PlayStation 3 ■ PlayStation Portable ■ PlayStation Network ■ PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

AUGUST 09

The Official Magazine

WORLD FIRST

FINAL FANTASY XIII

EXCLUSIVE REVIEW
FIGHT NIGHT
ROUND 4

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 22 (August 2009)

OMG!
IT'S THE
NEW PSP

New games +
features inside

Bayonetta
Wolfenstein
Madden 10
Previewed

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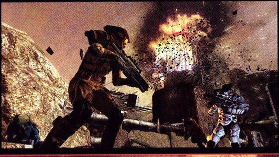

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Blood
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Violence

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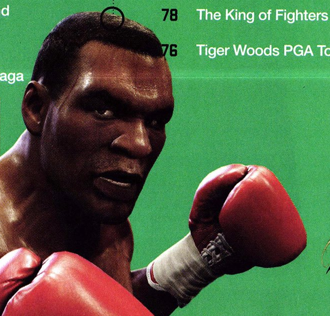

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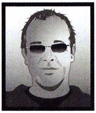
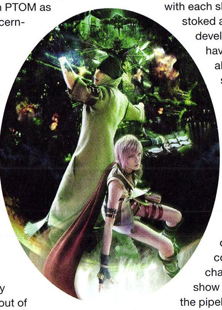


Editor's Note

"Space is disease and danger wrapped in darkness and silence."

It's pretty simple, really: get the chance to spend more time with *Final Fantasy XIII* and its developers, you jump at it. Or in our case, you have Teresa brave the swine flu concerns and requirement to wear a mask, and send her on a plane to Japan for a flying visit. Her time with the principals behind the game's creation makes her the most informed *FF XIII* person in North America. Really. And while you can read her extensive behind-the-scenes story starting on page 40 (complete with pictures taken inside the vaunted development studio), consider this just a part of our ongoing *Final Fantasy* insider reveals. It's certainly the most prominent game currently in development for PS3 in Japan, and over the coming months you can count on PTOM as your source for every discernable nugget.



You may have seen some of the footage online by the time you read this issue—as we ship it out the door the day before heading down to LA for the games industry's major trade show, E3. Touted as being back to something like the spectacle it was before downsizing two years ago, we expect big announcements from all the major publishers, and we keenly anticipate exciting news out of SCEA's press conference. Seriously exciting news. Across games, hardware, and online services, we hope to hear news that will provide the momentum to fire the PS3 through a crucial holiday season. We'll break down the important revelations, with in-depth analysis of what they all mean for you in our next issue.

> “Developers are getting more comfortable with the hardware challenges, and it's starting to show in the quality of the games in the pipeline.”

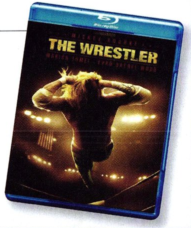
For this issue, we're stacked with previews of the games that will line shelves during the holidays. Really, there's something for everyone, and the quality bar seems to be raised with each showcase. I'm personally stoked about *Split Second* from *Pure* developer Black Box (though I'll have to wait 'til 2010 for that) and all the big sports franchises seem to have fresh new details that will have them competing for my time *(FIFA* and *Madden,* in particular). And I realize, as I write this, that the list of games I could reel off as being stoked to see is surprisingly long. As part two of our State of the PlayStation Union story reveals (p. 52), developers are getting more comfortable with the hardware challenges, and it's starting to show in the quality of the games in the pipeline.

So enjoy the issue, we'll be back for more next month!

Rob

"Quote" contest

As you hopefully realize, that quote at the top of this page is taken from a movie. To win a random Blu-ray movie from the pile in our cupboard just identify the movie and send an email to **PTOM_editor@futureus.com** with the words August Quote in the subject line. With a bit of luck you'll be randomly selected, and be just like Pedro Cuellar of Irving, TX, who identified July's issue quote from old-school favorite, *Clash of the Titans.*



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EDITORIAL
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF **Rob Smith**
MANAGING EDITOR **Roger Burchill**
ASSISTANT EDITOR **Teresa Dun**
ASSISTANT EDITOR **Scott Butterworth**
INTERN **Carlos Ruiz**
EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS **George Chronis, Jason D'Aprile, Ian Dean, James Howell, Douglass Perry, Mikel Reparaz, Joe Rybicki**

ART
ART DIRECTOR **Ken Bousquet**
DESIGN CONTRIBUTORS **Shelley Szudera, Gary Liew, Katrin Auch, Christina Empedocles, Nathan Wilson**

BUSINESS
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER **Kristen Salvatore**
ksalvatore@futureus.com
SENIOR DIRECTOR NATIONAL ADVERTISING **Rachelle Considine**
650-238-2505, rconsidine@futureus.com
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR INTEGRATED SALES **Nate Hunt**
415-269-5408, nhunt@futureus.com
REGIONAL SALES DIRECTOR **Isaac Ugay**
949-305-0767, iugay@futureus.com
REGIONAL SALES MANAGER **Rachel Campos**
650-745-9207, rcampos@futureus.com
ACCOUNT MANAGER **Arthur St. Germain**
650-238-2571, astgermain@futureus.com
INTEGRATED SALES DIRECTOR **Joe Pomparelli**
323-342-1888, jpomparelli@futureus.com
INTEGRATED SALES MANAGER **David Wells**
646-723-5493, dwells@futureus.com
DETROIT CONSUMER MANAGER **Alan Dickinson**
248-792-2408, alandmedia@comcast.net
ADVERTISING COORDINATOR **Heidi Hapin**
hhapin@futureus.com
MARKETING MANAGER **Andrea Recio-Ang**
arecio-ang@futureus.com

PRODUCTION
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR **Richie Lesovoy**
SENIOR PRODUCTION COORDINATOR **Larry Briseno**
PRINT ORDER COORDINATOR **Jennifer Lim**

CONSUMER MARKETING
DIRECTOR CONSUMER MARKETING **Rich McCarthy**
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FUTURE PLC
30 Monmouth St., Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW, England
Tel +44 1225 442244
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NON-EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN: Roger Parry
CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Stevie Spring
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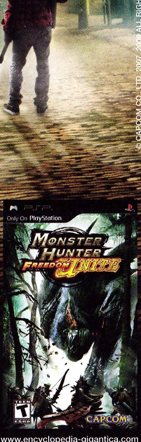
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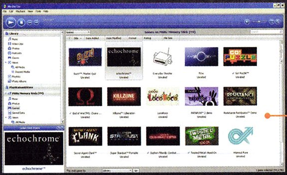
1 PSPGo

It's Go time, people

SCEA President Jack Tretton opened the PlayStation press conference jokingly acknowledging the leaks that made PSPGo unofficially public before its planned announcement on June 2. But the actual unveil was left to SCE President Kaz Hirai, who revealed the two names for the handheld: "the worst-kept secret of E3" and PSPGo.

News that the PSP toolkit costs are to be reduced by 80% should encourage more and more developers to join the new PSPGo. That's supported by news that the Video Delivery Service is expanding to include content from the likes of Showtime, E!, HDNet, and Starz, and can be downloaded on the PSP and managed on your PC through a new application called Media Go. All these pieces will also be available for existing PSPs, and the PSP3000 will continue to be marketed and sold for those looking for a more budget-minded purchase.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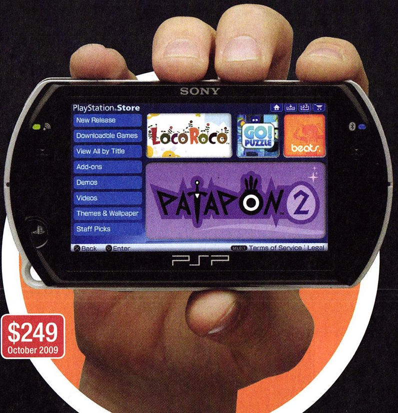
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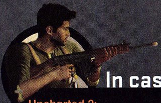


In case you missed it...

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves
Spectacular action and breathtaking cinematics—along with punchy dialogue—put this right at the top of our "want to play NOW" list.

Final Fantasy XIV Online
No, that's not a typo! Square's next Final Fantasy online will be available exclusively on PS3, and released, allegedly, in late 2010.

Agent
Rockstar North (yes, the GTA guys) have a 1970s-era thriller in the works that's a huge exclusive coup for PS3.

ModNation Racers
Building on the LBP concept of Play, Create, Share, and putting it on four wheels. Design your cars and racers, then build your own unique world as you go.

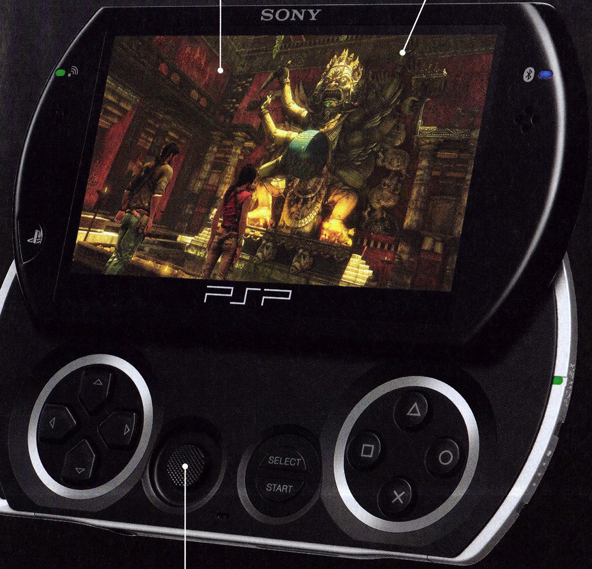
Motion controller
This wand-like gizmo can be turned into virtually any onscreen device, including a baseball bat or a tennis racquet, a sword, fan, or flashlight — even guns.

OUR HANDHELD FUTURE

In a nutshell

Flip-up screen

(New screen from Uncharted 2: Among Thieves for the PSPGo)



Single analog stick

PLUS: 16GB internal flash memory
Integrated Bluetooth
M2 memory stick port for adding extra storage

The Games of PSP

To support the announcement of the new hardware, several big franchise titles were revealed, including Resident Evil Portable and these big hitters:

Metal Gear Solid Peace Walker
"Snake is coming to the PSP," reveals Hideo Kojima, adding that he's writing the script and producing the game along with the main MGS4 team (emphasizing it's not a spin-off).

THE BASICS:
- » Set in 1974, 10 years after MGS3.
- » The Cold War stand-off of nuclear deterrents has allowed an unknown organization to take over Costa Rica.
- » Costa Rica, without a military, needs help and turns to Outer Heaven.
- » Pitched as the legendary "missing link" in the Metal Gear saga.
- » The initial trailer was punctuated in typical Kojima comedic fashion, showing Snake using the famous cardboard box and having a buddy slip in with him!

GRAN TURISMO

Gran Turismo
Kazunouri Yamauchi announced that GT PSP would run at 60fps and showcase some staggering numbers: 800 cars, 35 tracks, and loads of layout variations of those tracks. Four-player multiplayer will be part of the package, along with the ability to share cars in your garage with your friends—likely the only way you can get close to seeing and driving the 800 in the game.

2

UNDEAD **REBORN**

We talk zombie-Nazis with Eric Biessman, the man in charge of resurrecting *Wolfenstein*

So how did Raven get the opportunity to design the next *Wolfenstein*?

ERIC BIESSMAN: We've worked with id for quite a few years now. I started at Raven 15 years ago when we were working on *Heretic*—which was with Mr. Carmac and the crew down there—and over the years we've just continued to use their engines and we've done multiple projects with them. And I guess the big thing was they knew that we're fans. I mean, *Wolfenstein* was a life-changing event for me. When I first played *Wolf 3D*, I was really into roleplaying games at the time, and suddenly here's this big action game that lets you shoot guns and fight Nazis and kill Hitler, things like that. And it just kind of set the gaming world on its ear.

Did your love of the first game and the weight of the franchise add any pressure?

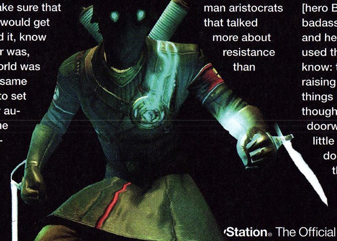
I definitely think it affected how we came into it. I guess you could call it the grandfather of the first-person shooter. So as we came into development, we knew that we would have to make sure that fans of the game would get into it, understand it, know who the character was, know what the world was about. But at the same time, we wanted to set it up where a new audience could come in and find this really cool universe where the Nazis are doing some weird stuff. They're experimenting with the occult, there's dark science, and I think that's really what makes *Wolf* unique—the setting.

So given all of the occult material, would you still consider *Wolfenstein* a WWII game?

Well, it's set in World War II, but it's a science fiction occult game. It's sort of like saying Indiana Jones is a World War II movie—it's really not. The setting may be WWII and it's somewhat understandable, but we have the license to really throw a curveball and, you know, "What the hell is that thing?" or "What is this new weapon that I've just found?" Obviously, we're not constrained by realism. We can do cool things just as long as they fit the story and add to the gameplay.

How much actual history remains in the game?

Our goal is to keep it understandable, but at the same time, not be constrained by it. We took things like the Kreisau Circle who in reality were a bunch of German aristocrats that talked more about resistance than really picked up guns. Then you enter Wolfenstein and they're a gun-toting military resistance that you're working with and they're, you know, throwing grenades and blowing stuff up. So we Wolfenstein'd it. And there's other things. Like, the main thing that the Nazis are trying to tap into is this energy source that's called the Black Sun, and we got this idea because in reality, the Nazis had this symbol of the Black Sun. It eventually became part of the SS logo. And we thought, "Well here's a connection that we can pull from. What if it was real? What if the Nazis could tap into this? What could they do with it?" So we kept opening up these "what if" questions: what if the Nazis had this energy source? What if the Nazis could raise the dead? Things like that. Those are the questions that I think have come up throughout the entire franchise history, and we really kept that alive in *Wolfenstein.*



How will these occult themes affect gameplay?

Obviously in the previous games, [hero B.J. Blazkowicz] had the badass weaponry, the big guns, and he's fought enemies that have used the occult against him—you know: the zombies, the people raising the dead, the mutants, things like that. So this time we thought, "What if we give B.J. a doorway into the occult and a little taste of what the Nazis are doing and let the player turn the Nazi weaponry back against them?"

How far do you believe it's really a horror game in a shooter wrapper? Will it be scary? Gory?

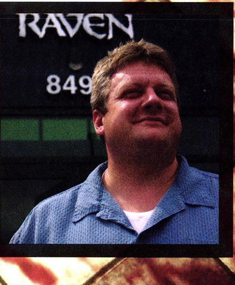
Yeah, I think… We wanted to offer the player variety. So some levels you're going to have the Kreisau Circle fighting alongside you as you're just ripping through stuff, and then some levels like "The Hospital" which are more… There's some weird stuff going on at the hospital. It's more mysterious and it's spooky and it's moody just to give the player a little bit different gameplay. So we'll have gore, we'll have the more horror side, we'll have the pure action-adventure side, we'll have the more gritty just war side.

Final question: Can you live up to Mecha-Hitler? What's cooler than that?

Oh Mecha-Hitler! It was one of the top things on our list to include, but because we really wanted to make [the game] more based around our story, it just would have been weird. We would have had to really pigeonhole and shove him in. So who knows what the future holds, you know; that's all up to id Software. But can we make something as cool as Mecha-Hitler? Obviously, I think we did. I'm hoping that you're going to find new experiences that 10 years down the road, you're going to say, "Wow, do you remember this cool part in Wolfenstein?" and kind of have your own stories based on this game. *[NOTE: Original classic* Wolfenstein 3D *is now available for download from the PlayStation Store.*

Eric Biessman 411

JOB: Creative Director for *Wolfenstein* at Raven Software
EDUCATION: BA in English from the University of Wisconsin, Madison
PREVIOUSLY WORKED ON: *Heretic*, *Hexen*, and *Soldier of Fortune* series, *Quake 4*
GAME THAT GOT HIM INTO GAMING: *Pitfall* on the Atari 2600
FUN FACT: Plays in a band called Cold Hard Cash. He's a multi-talented guy!



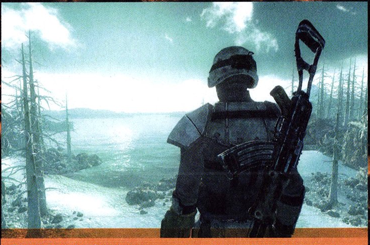
OPENING THE VAULT 3

Previously exclusive *Fallout 3* DLC finally coming to the PS3!

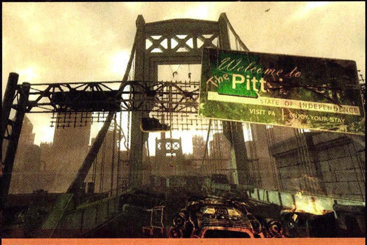
That's right, read that headline. *Savor it.* Judging by the unstoppable torrent of emails that's been assaulting our inbox for the past several months, quite a few of you will be pleased to know that all three *Fallout 3* downloadable content packs—which were previously exclusive to the Xbox 360—will soon be available on the PS3.

The first, *Operation: Anchorage,* will be released in late June, followed in four to six weeks by *The Pitt* and then by *Broken Steel* another four to six after that. And just in case three injections of steaming-hot content isn't enough for you, Bethesda plans to release two new packs—*Point Lookout* and *Mothership Zeta*—once the first three pieces of DLC have dropped.

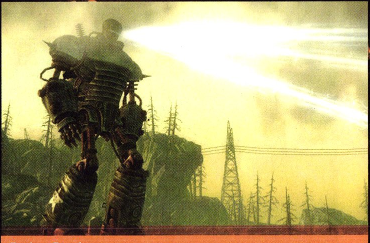
Each of the five packs will cost $9.99 and will only be available via download…for now. A special "Game of the Year" edition of *Fallout 3* containing both the original game and all five add-ons (and costing just $59.99) will hit store shelves this October—so no need to worry if you don't have the cash or connection necessary to acquire the DLC right now. You can just pick it up on the cheap in a few months.



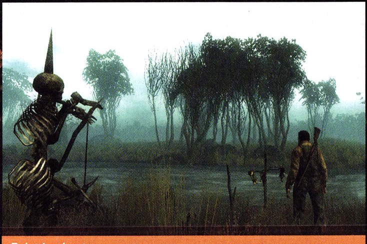
Operation: Anchorage takes place in the game's "distant past" and places you in the middle of a battle against the Chinese army in the days before Earth became a giant nuclear wasteland. Obviously, this pack focuses heavily on combat and will provide you with new weapons and a new perk accordingly. Expect about four to five hours of additional gameplay.
Current Metacritic Score: 69



The Pitt transports you to a post-apocalyptic Pittsburg, where someone has managed to create a cure for mutations. Your job is to make it to his settlement and retrieve the cure at all costs, and once you're there, you can choose to liberate The Pitt's slaves…or not. Either way, you'll be granted a new melee weapon called the AutoAxe, "a powerful, serrated rotary blade hungry for flesh." Brutal.
Current Metacritic Score: 76



Broken Steel removes the original game's "ending," thereby allowing you to continue playing even after you've completed the main storyline. It also raises the level cap from 20 to 30, introduces new weapons and enemies, provides new story-driven missions, and even adds new areas to the map. So how much content is it in terms of hours? Well, that's entirely up to you.
Current Metacritic Score: 82



Point Lookout will add "a massive new swampland area filled with new quests and content," according to the official press release. And Mothership Zeta will allow you to "experience an alien abduction first hand and find out if you're tough enough to survive." We'll let you know as soon as we learn more about these two packs, but for now, enjoy these excruciatingly interesting teases.
Score: TBD

4

OUT OF CONTROL

With game-specific peripherals becoming more and more common, your living room is about to get a whole lot more crowded.

What began innocently enough with a few molded-plastic guitars has started to grow into a full-blown peripheral invasion. Sure, flight sticks and racing wheels have been around since the gaming dark ages, but never before have specialized controllers been available in such abundance or diversity. And with these new controllers come unique and exciting game experiences that simply wouldn't be possible on a traditional gamepad. But are gamers going to be willing to put down the extra cash for all this new equipment? Are these peripherals really going to change the way we play or will they simply take up more space in our closets? For now, we'll have to wait and see, but soon enough, these controllers will be competing for a spot next to your *Guitar Hero* plastic axes .

Hofner Violin Bass

Rickenbacker 325

Gretsch Duo Jet

THAT'S RIGHT, MORE FAKE PLASTIC INSTRUMENTS But these aren't just any instruments; they're The Beatles' instruments! Though they seem to be functionally identical to previous *Rock Band* guitar peripherals, these lovingly crafted replicas of the Rickenbacker 325, Gretsch Duo Jet, and Hofner Violin Bass are easily the prettiest of the bunch. Pick 'em up when *The Beatles: Rock Band* drops in September.

THIS ISN'T THE WORLD'S FIRST full-scale skateboard controller *(Top Skater,* anyone?), but it's a definite first for the hugely successful *Tony Hawk* franchise—which has been on hiatus since the disappointing *Project 8.* This board packs two accelerometers and four motion sensors, and will control all of your movements in the upcoming *Tony Hawk: RIDE.* Talk about teaching an old dog new tricks, right?

The Ride Board

DJ HERO VS. SCRATCH: THE ULTIMATE DJ—the next great rhythm game rivalry. Much like *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band,* the two share similar elements of everything from music to gameplay. So naturally, their peripherals have a lot in common too…though they certainly aren't identical. *Scratch's* "Scratch Deck" offers a free-spinning record wheel, five note buttons, and a crossfader. *DJ Hero's* controller has only three note buttons but adds an effects dial and Star Power button on top of the crossfader and wheel.

Numark SCRATCH DECK

DJ Hero Turntable Controller

Numark Scratch Deck

BAKUGAN: A PHENOMENON

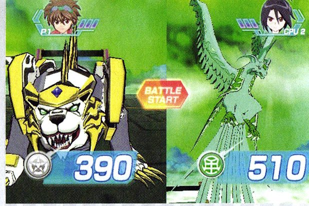
5

A cartoon, a toy, a strategy game, and now coming to PlayStation 2 and 3, this is what your boys are playing (apparently)!

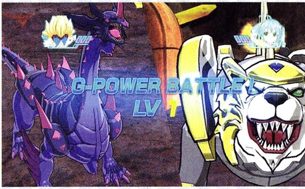
Are you a six- to 12-year-old boy? If so, we've little doubt you know what Bakugan is. If you're parent of said demographic, you've likely been dragged to the store on the release of each new toy set, and had the TV permanently set to the Cartoon Network for each episode of the anime-style cartoon. Like Pokémon before it, this cartoon and toy craze is expanding into the videogame world, with versions to appear on both PS3 and PS2.

Developed by NOW Productions, the videogame will feature 18 Brawlers and have you placing your virtual cards (from a deck of 200 total cards) in the arena, and then rolling your Bakugan balls towards strategic cards. When they hit, as with the magnetic toys, the balls pop open to reveal the monster and display its stats.

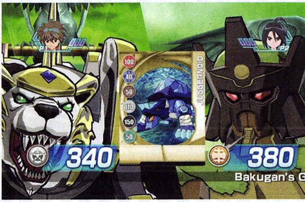
How the game then plays out? Maybe you have to fit directly in the target demographic to figure out that conundrum. But with eight different colorful environments and over 30 battlegrounds the games on either platform could provide a suitable one-stop shop of Bakugan cards and monsters, and save those regular trips to the toy store.



The massive installed base of the PS2 makes this a no-brainer for the demographic.



The difference in color quality and clarity is evident on the PS3, bringing the battling Bakugan to more vibrant life.



The two dueling monsters face-off, comparing their stats, and establishing a winner of the battle. Or something.

THE NEXT WAVE

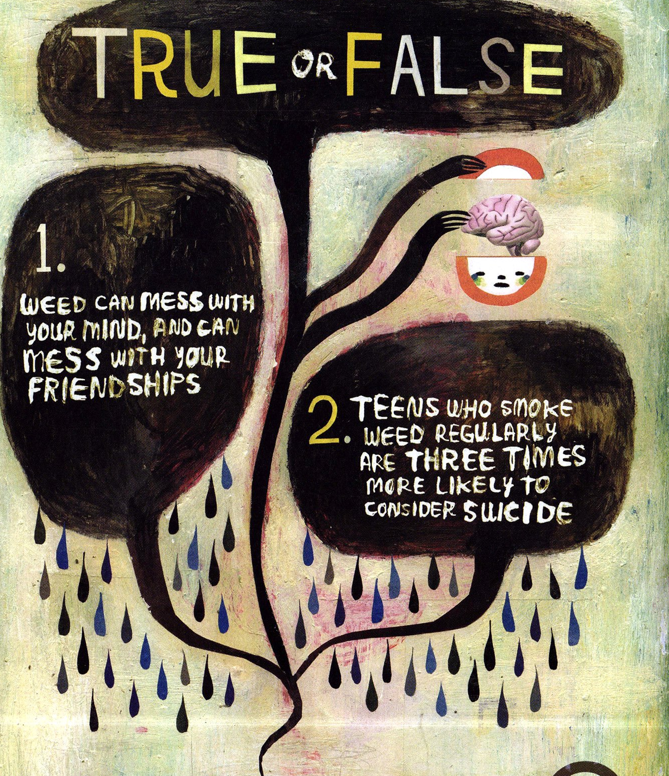
The Japanese-anime themed card game and line of toys practically owned the 2008 Holiday shopping amongst young boys. The collectible battle spheres are even a hit in the PTOM offices where we love to watch them spring open upon rolling over magnetic cards, even though we have no idea how to play the game. Maybe that'll change now since the videogame is on the way. Check out **www.bakugan.com** to see what the kids are into, but here are the latest additions to the Bakugan toy universe:

BAKUGAN TRAP
MSRP: $7.49
Bakugan Traps are powerful, strategic Bakugan that let you turn the tide of the game to your advantage—unleash them when your opponent least expects it. Available in shapes like the pyramid, cube, coin, football, drum, and more, each Trap comes with one Gate card and one Ability card.

BAKUBOWL
MSRP: $24.99
Easily collapsible and portable, the Bakubowl is the latest evolution of the Battle Arena where you can face off against three opponents in Bakugan combat. The game board features new ramps so players can execute trick shots.

Office of National Drug Control Policy/Partnership for a Drug-Free America®

TRUE OR FALSE



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2. TEENS WHO SMOKE WEED REGULARLY ARE THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO CONSIDER SUICIDE

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6 HARDWARE

Tritton AX Pro Headset

MSRP: $160
Website: www.trittontechnologies.com

The Tritton AX Pro headset is a hard value nut to crack. Based on our initial quality impressions when opening the box and our subsequent appraisal of its surround sound performance, we guesstimated its price to be in the $200+ range. So when we found out that it cost $160 it seemed like a pretty good deal. After all, the headphones support Dolby Digital 5.1 and sport eight speakers (four in each ear)! There's no doubt that the unit enhances your gaming experience, especially when connected through the PS3's optical sound port—it managed to invoke chills while playing *Ghostbusters,* so we're hesitant to try it on something truly scary like *Silent Hill!* But at the end of the day, $160 is still a fair chunk of change. We deem the headset well worth the price, but it comes down to how important your game's sound experience is to you (and only you).

COMFY EARS
The soft cloth ear pads are among the most comfortable we've ever experienced, making it easy to enjoy lengthy gaming sessions. The inclusion of a set of interchangeable faux leather ear cup padding is a nice touch though.

GET WIRED
While the AX Pro does sport a 12-foot cord, the bevy of shorter cables that emanate from the headset's Audio Decoder Box means that it's better suited for desk, rather than couch, duty.

SPEAK UP!
The removable swivel microphone is serviceable, but not the AX Pro's best feature. It has a tendency to pick up extraneous sounds and while it does swing outwards (or can be completely removed) we generally prefer mics that swing up and out of the way when not in use.

Tritton Gaming Backpack

MSRP: $99.99 | Website: www.trittontechnologies.com

Being the workaholics that we are, PTOM editors are always looking for a convenient solution for lugging our PS3 consoles home. Although it's far from the cheapest console bag, we're hard-pressed to recall another PS3 tote that offers more storage capacity than the solidly constructed Tritton Gaming Backpack. There's a place (and an individual bag) for seemingly every game-related item you'd ever want to take with you—including a space for your Tritton headset (of course). We do question the need for the four buckles that augment the bag's zippers as they seem superfluous and are a bit fussy to disengage, but they probably do add a smidge of additional security and at least look cool. While we'd probably stop short of checking the bag on an airline, the ample padding gives us confidence that our precious gaming console would arrive unscathed in nearly every other instance of transport. The question is, how much is that peace of mind worth to you? $100 is on the steep end of the value scale to us, but we're there if it goes on sale.

PPC Locking HDMI Cable

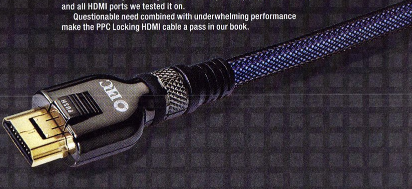
MSRP: $49 to $73 | Website: www.connect2ppc.com

The PPC Locking HDMI cable intrigued us mainly because it's a product we're not sure is really necessary. The general consensus around the PTOM office is that HDMI cables slipping out of the sockets of our PS3s and HDTVs isn't a common problem, but we *suppose* it could happen... so why not check it out?

Available in lengths of three-, six-, and 12-feet, PPC's HDMI cable is one of the more robustly constructed we've encountered. While we can't quantatively test performance, the gold-plated pins and braided interference shielding suggest this is a quality piece of cabling. We certainly couldn't spot any performance deficiencies based on our naked-eye testing.

But it's the patented locking mechanism and its claimed ability to hold onto a port three times stronger than conventional cables that was the key. While the locking mechanism may offer a modicum of increased holding power, a modest tug of the cable apparently exceeds the three times threshold quite easily as the cable repeatedly popped out of any and all HDMI ports we tested it on.

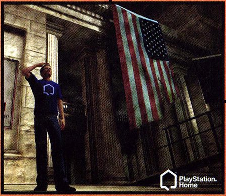
Questionable need combined with underwhelming performance make the PPC Locking HDMI cable a pass in our book.



REASONS TO GO HOME 7

Haven't been Home in a while? Then you're missing out on our three favorite new spaces!

1. Resistance Space



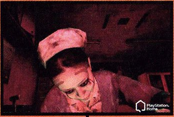
Features

- » Four Barrels of Fury, a turret-based shooting mini-game (it's simplistic, just point and shoot, but you have to play it to earn the *Resistance 2* clothing items!)
- » *Resistance 2* game launching support
- » Reward items (shirt, hat, hoodie)
- » Leaderboards

Cost Free!

Why We Love It Every Friday, from 6:00pm to midnight (Pacific Time) the *Resistance* space will host *"Resistance 2:* SRPA Siege" nights, where the *Resistance* community (you guys and us!) can get together to play *Resistance 2.* On the other hand, as much as we love free Home clothing, isn't scoring one million points in Four Barrels of Fury a bit much to ask? Practice your twitch shooting skills if you want that hoodie…

2. Siren Space



Features

- » Ward of Despair mini-game (a remade scene from the actual game that you play with up to four other Home avatars)
- » Four unique rewards (Nurse outfit, Doctor outfit, Miyako's outfit, Alcove set)
- » An odd carnival hangout space where you can admire a creepy billboard, chat with other avatars in the dark, or pop your avatar's face through one of the character cutouts.

Cost Free!

Why We Love It We're masochistic, okay? We enjoy the frights. Plus, the Ward of Despair is one of the best mini-games available in Home at the moment. You'll have to play through it several times to earn all the rewards (don't worry, there are several scenarios so it doesn't get tedious), but here's the downside: the line to get into the game can be competitive and you have to depend on others to help you earn the rewards. And working with strangers can be scarier than the game itself!

3. Living Room Stage Set

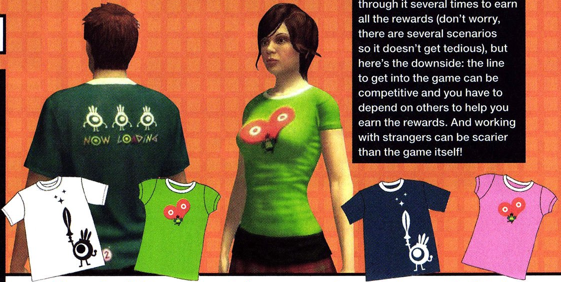
Features

- » All the goodies to make your own sitcom (backdrops, camera, adjustable lights)
- » 12 free props, including sofas, a fridge, and a bookshelf (you can purchase more from the store)

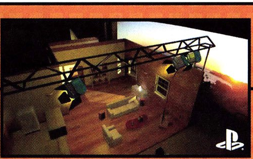
Cost $4.99

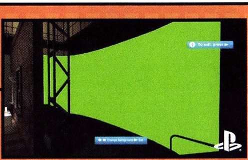
Why We Love It Okay, so it's complicated. Camera angles, lighting, prop set-up…you'll need a whole crew helping out (we recommend utilizing voice chat as you all congregate in one person's Living Room set), unless you want to spend hours tweaking on your own. We suggest assigning one person to set design, another to fiddle with the three cameras (which you can tilt, zoom, and move), another to lighting and backdrops, and then there's still the costumes, script, and blocking! Not easy.

For now, the options are limited, since Home doesn't have that many clothing or furniture options. But if you're devoted, you'll be able to make something creative. The Living Room set is tailored more for aspiring filmmakers than casual movie-lovers, but if you create an awesome clip, send an email to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com and we'll judge for ourselves! If all else fails, remake an episode of *How I Met Your Mother!* We'd watch it.



Also, don't forget to pick up your free *Patapon 2* shirts!

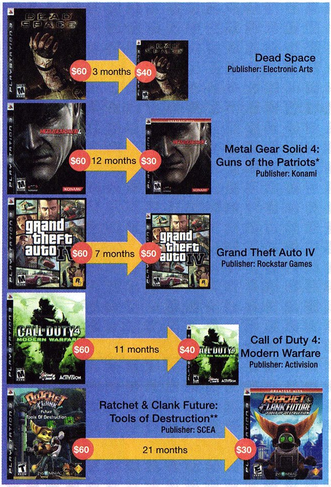




8 GET USED

Is buying a used game stealing from a developer and publisher (who see none of the revenue from that resale)? Are retailers like GameStop actually damaging the future potential of the games industry with this practice by limiting the amount of revenue flowing back into the game development pipeline? Many publishers say yes. Retailers say no. We presented the case for and against in the June issue, and you, the end user, shared your opinions by filling our inbox with emails. Digging deeper, what are the best options for budget conscious gamers? We break it down, along with some of your thoughts.

How long does it take for a game's price to drop?



* Right at press time the spectacular, pinnacle of the PS3 gaming craft (so far), *MGS4* was announced as part of the Greatest Hits line. Now at $29.99, you have absolutely NO excuse!

** The price of the original *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction* never dropped a dime before its induction into the Greatest Hits line. It's now available for $29.99.

In favor of Used Games

"I'm married, have two kids, a house payment, and two car payments. I just started playing *MGS4* because I found it for $30. If publishers don't want us buying used, they should lower the price of new games."
– Darrel Nysted, Barron WI

"I view previously purchased games as equity in gaming. I should be able to do as I please with that equity. It's never a good idea to let a company's ledger dictate freedom."
– ManChicken, via Twitter

Opposed to Used Games

"I would much rather buy new and have the assurance that I am the first person outside of the factory to touch it, as well as the satisfying knowledge that I am helping the publishers to create more games that I want to play."
– Chris, via email

"It didn't [initially] occur to me that I wasn't getting back anywhere near what I originally paid for the games that I was trading in."
– Billy, via email

Breaking Down the Prices

New or used games? Whatever your personal preference, here are the cold, hard numbers. We've taken games released from a few months to a few years ago and looked at how they're faring now in the new and used markets.

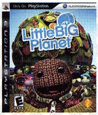
***Note: All prices from Amazon.com and eBay.com include shipping, are for a product in "Like New" condition, and are from reputable sellers with at least 90-percent positive rating. GameStop price is for a used copy from the store.**

KILLZONE 2

Release Date: February 27, 2009

List Price (New): $59.99
GameStop: $54.99
eBay: $44.00
Amazon: $43.98

Price difference between used and new: Up to $16.01.



LITTLEBIGPLANET

Release Date: October 28, 2008

List Price (New): $59.99
GameStop: $54.99
eBay: $30.72
Amazon: $33.39

Price difference between used and new: Up to $26.60.
(Note: As of press time, Amazon's list price for a new copy of *LBP* was discounted to $36.99, meaning you could be paying more for a used copy.)

STREET FIGHTER IV

Release Date: February 17, 2009

List Price (New): $59.99
GameStop: $54.99
eBay: $43.99
Amazon: $43.98

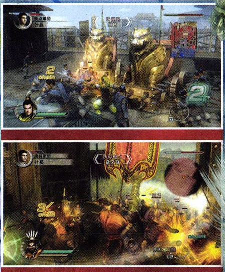
Price difference between used and new: Up to $16.01.

FALLOUT 3

Release Date: October 28, 2008

List Price (New): $59.99
GameStop: $49.99
eBay: $33.99
Amazon: $33.49

Price difference between used and new: Up to $26.50.
(Note: Amazon's list price for a new copy of *Fallout 3* was discounted to $44.99, so once again you could be paying more for a used copy than a new one.)


BE A RULER OR A ROGUE!

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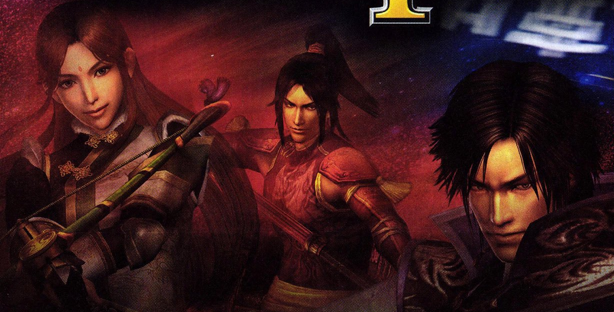

CREATE A CHARACTER!

PLAYSTATION 3 · PlayStation Network · XBOX 360® · XBOX LIVE

TEEN T · Alcohol Reference · Violence · CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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9 BD-LIVE FINALLY GETS ROLLING

Sony Pictures Blu-ray interactive feature gets serious

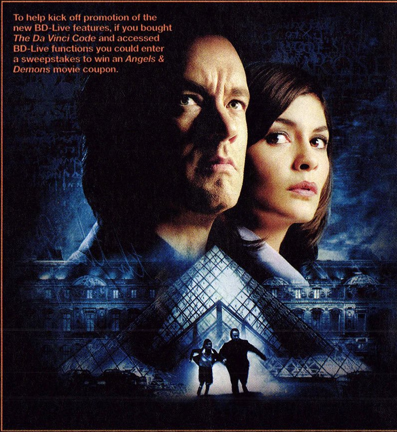
Did you even notice the BD-Live feature support bundled with the v2.20 firmware update in early 2008? Back then, BD-Live was pretty easy to miss. Although support for the online interactive capability comes with every Sony Blu-ray disc shipped after June 8th of last year, Sony Pictures simply wasn't able to keep up. Early growing pains included incompatible password systems, insufficient server capacity, and too little bandwidth to handle consumers trying to view various trailers online.

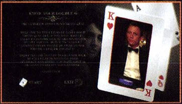
Fast-forward a year and BD-Live seems finally ready for prime time. The feature is like a connected environment that channels Blu-ray users online to access loyalty programs, contests, trivia games, and the like. If you liked DVD interactive special features, BD-Live expands the concept and takes it online. So while a movie trivia game on a DVD may not seem novel, playing that trivia game against a live person via BD-Live, as well as chatting with them, is definitely new.

PS3 owners tend to be on top of the online food chain, so BD-Live online features may not excite current owners. But the average consumer who doesn't know the joys of a PS3 might think it pretty cool indeed. To date, more than 3.5 million Blu-ray systems (out of a total of 10.5 million in the U.S., according to Sony Pictures) have accessed a BD-Live screen. Sony is so committed to the concept that it's added built-in Wi-Fi to its latest standalone Blu-ray player.

Sony Pictures chose the May theatrical release of *Angels & Demons* to roll out the newly fortified BD-Live complete with an online rewards program. Join the studio's Blu-ray Club, register your new Blu-ray discs, and earn points toward Sony products. People who access BD-Live via *The Da Vinci Code* Blu-ray disc can also enter a sweepstakes to win an *Angels & Demons* movie coupon and a new Wi-Fi–equipped Sony Blu-ray player.

As Sony would very much like different kinds of people to buy PS3s than already do, BD-Live might turn out to be an extra reason for them to bring one home.


To help kick off promotion of the new BD-Live features, if you bought *The Da Vinci Code* and accessed BD-Live functions you could enter a sweepstakes to win an *Angels & Demons* movie coupon.

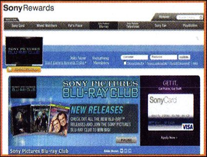


« An online BD-Live Bond trivia game from the *Casino Royale* Blu-ray disc.

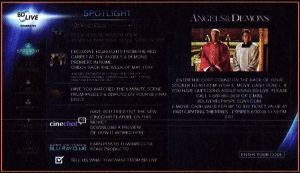
Sony's new BDP-S560 Blu-ray player comes with Wi-Fi.

What do points make? Prizes!

Signing up for the Blu-ray club is easy enough, and provides small rewards if you're a committed Blu-ray movie addict. You earn 100 points for accessing the BD-Live option in any supported movie that you might be watching on your PS3 and registering it. Visiting the Sonyrewards.com website and participating in contests and other sticky-inducing daily and weekly events, trivia quizzes, and more will earn additional points. Small ticket items such as music downloads cost just a few hundred points, but that basically means you'll get about 10 songs for every eight Blu-ray movies you register. Big ticket items require tens of thousands of points, so unless you're putting huge charges on your PlayStation credit card, don't expect this program to earn you that high-end Sony digital camera any time soon.



CHECK OUT ALL THE NEW BLU-RAY™ RELEASES AND JOIN THE SONY PICTURES BLU-RAY CLUB TO WIN BIG!



EXCLUSIVE HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RED CARPET AT THE ANGELS & DEMONS PREMIERE IN ROME.
CHECK BACK THE WEEK OF MAY 11TH

HAVE YOU WATCHED THE 5-MINUTE SCENE FROM ANGELS & DEMONS ON YOUR BLU-RAY DISC?

HAVE YOU TRIED OUT THE NEW CINECHAT FEATURE ON THIS MOVIE?
DOWNLOAD A PREVIEW OF HOW IT WORKS HERE

EARN POINTS TOWARD COOL SONY PRODUCTS!

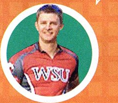
☑ TELL US WHAT YOU WANT FROM BD-LIVE

ENTER THE CODE FOUND ON THE BACK OF YOUR STICKER TO REDEEM YOUR E-MOVIE CASH TICKET. IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT USING BD-LIVE, PLEASE CALL 1-800-860-2878 OR EMAIL BDLIVEHELP@SPE.SONY.COM.
E-MOVIE CASH VALID FOR UP TO $10 TICKET VALUE AT PARTICIPATING THEATRES. EXPIRES 6/30/09 11:59 PM EST.

Sony has high hopes for its BD-Live rewards program.

10 THE BURNING QUESTION

This month, we asked developers: What was the last game you played to completion?



Michael Gutmann
ZIPPER INTERACTIVE, VICE PRESIDENT
I guess it was *Resistance: Fall of Man* because I haven't finished *Resistance 2* yet. It was fantastic. It kept me engrossed from beginning to end.

Our take: Us too, Michael, us too.

Motomu Toriyama
SQUARE ENIX, DIRECTOR
3D Picross for the Nintendo DS [only available in Japan]. It has about 300 different puzzles, and I completed every single one. It's the kind of 3D game where you make calculations to erase certain blocks. You carve it bit by bit. It's fun, like creating a model or like you're a dentist, chipping away!

Our take: Since when has dentistry been fun?

Matt Wilson
SOE SEATTLE, CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Last game I played to completion was *LittleBigPlanet.* Played to completion very quickly; loved it. My son and I play it all the time. And probably the thing that surprised me most about *LBP* is that I actually like the user-generated content better than the game-developer content, and now my son and I play user-generated content all the time. It really changed my perspective on user-generated content.

Our take: Hmm, wonder if that'll come into play in *The Agency*... *the PTOM imagination train chugs wildly away*

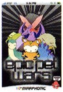
Yoshinori Kitase
SQUARE ENIX, PRODUCER
I haven't actually completed a game recently. I take little bites out of a lot of games just to get the experience, so I have to go back a little bit to remember a game that I actually did complete, and that would be *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare.*

Our take: For some reason, it's hard to picture someone from RPG madhouse Square Enix playing a first-person shooter...

ETCETERA

All the *other* stuff that delights the PTOM staff and distracts us from our work—since playing games all the time is just *so* exhausting.

Star Trek | Movie | $10.75
Awesome. Oh, we need more words than that? Totally awesome? Rob the Trekkie/er finally went to the movies after an absence of... (He can't remember the last thing he saw in the theater.) ...to pay homage to J.J. Abrams' reinvention of *Star Trek.* While he complained about the Spock meeting Spock scenes (time travel in any entertainment medium "...never makes logical sense!") the gags for original series followers (aka old dudes) were phenomenal. Three thumbs up.



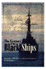
Epic Pet Wars | iPhone Game | Free
Teresa used to have trouble waking up in the morning, but no longer. Ever since she downloaded *Epic Pet Wars,* she's had a pet to train. The Energy needed to train regenerates in real time, so to eke the most out of her pet, she has to start the slave-driving the moment she awakens. She's convinced Roger to join the pet wars and he in turn convinced his wife, and now his five-year-old son has demanded his own pet monster! All three are addicted. If you've got the game, add 'em to your posse (Teresa: emauem; Roger: e8hsou).

Rob Paravonian | Comedy | Online: free; Live: ticket price
Proving that Facebook does actually serve a purpose, Roger has finally discovered the comedy stylings of Rob Paravonian thanks to this video a FB friend brought to his attention: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdxkVQy7QLM. It tickles Roger's inner band geek to no end. Check out more of Rob's comic genius at RobPRocks.com.

the thermals

Now We Can See | Album | $9 (via digital download on Amazon)
So there's this band from Portland called The Thermals—they're a fun, lo-fi indie band with punk rock energy, garage rock tones, and poppy vocal melodies. Naturally, Scott really likes 'em. Back in April they released a new album entitled "Now We Can See," which basically took everything that made them great before and added a little bit of polish. Of course, Scott insisted on telling everyone about it. So we confiscated his iPod. What now, Scott?!

Sliders: Season One | TV | Free on Hulu
No, we're not talking about the little cheeseburgers that Roger considers a food-group unto itself. Instead, this is the television series that Carlos the Intern saw a long time ago but never fully understood because he missed the origin story. Thanks to Hulu.com, everything is becoming clear... It turns out that it's mostly about sliding from dimension to dimension. Go figure.



The Century of the Black Ships | Book | $27.99
Games. Band. And now, history. Roger's cavalcade of geekness continues with his unabated excitement over this new book from VIZ Media, which offers insights and perspectives from a variety of Japanese writers on historical relations between the U.S. and Japan, and the seemingly inevitable confluence of events that lead to war. Ahhh, good times.

Dorkfest '09 | D&D | Priceless
Jim can't come to D&D night because Fred is ill and he doesn't want to get infected. Jemima and Stan don't care and are in attendance, and so is, er, *Bob* (names changed to protect dork-baiting). But this merry band of gamers has technology! Jim has a web cam. Fred has a Macbook Pro with built-in camera. They both have AIM. When the floorplan strategerizing calls for Jim to make his move, the Macbook is tipped to focus on the miniatures so he can see the situation and make his move. This is 21st century dorkery at its finest. It's also a true story. As Scott added, "Were you guys listening to Rush, too?"

The Pink Couch Sessions | Video series | Free
The internet is just full of hidden treasures, and this month, Scott's been enjoying one in particular: The Pink Couch Sessions. Basically, it's the DIY version of *MTV Unplugged* from the early '90s: touring artists from smaller, independent labels stop by project-creator Dave Garwacke's living room to film acoustic versions of their songs. The formula is simple, but the videos are amazing. Head to ifyoumakeit.com to check out videos by Mike Hale, Shinobu, Spoonboy, and more!

Angels & Demons | Movie | Free, if you sneak in
Who needs Metacritic or RottenTomatoes.com when you've got Carlos the Intern's Insta-Movie Review: "Man, the last movie with Tom Hanks had a lot of puzzles and stuff, but this one was hardcore! It even had a priest jumping out of an exploding helicopter. GO ACTION-POPE!"

Ramen | Delicious noodles | 800 yen
Hot, salty broth. Tender, slightly bouncy noodles. Flavorful slices of pork. A few strips of bamboo. And a cold, hardboiled egg, sliced in half, with the yolk solid yet almost runny. Ah, ramen! Even though she was in Japan for only 36 hours, Teresa enjoyed three separate bowls of ramen (on three separate occasions), all from the same ramen joint! She told us later she was just kidding, but we wonder...was she?

Blu-ray Central

TV mania is sweeping Blu-ray players everywhere, as publishers realize shows just look and sound better on the format. Also, weird French sci-fi, more lame vampire action, proper *Star Trek*, and proof that Clint Eastwood can still kick your ass.

PlayStation: The Official Magazine
PICK OF THE MONTH

SKYNET EDITION
SCHWARZENEGGER
T2
JUDGMENT DAY

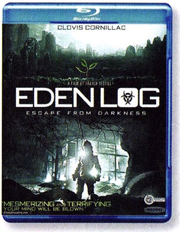
T2: Judgment Day: Skynet Edition

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | This is the second, and hopefully last time *T2* will hit Blu-ray. Yet unlike most unnecessary re-issues, the *Skynet Edition* is easily worth the upgrade. Aside from containing both the director's cut and theatrical version, the picture and sound quality are noticeably superior. This is easily the best the movie has ever looked, and although the numerous flaws in the effects are certainly magnified in HD, *T2* remains a modern sci-fi masterpiece.

| EXTRAS | An amazing array of extras await *Terminator* fans. Though a lot have been seen before, the integrated PiP features, multiple commentary tracks, tons of making-of videos, trivia tracks, games, and integrated BD-Live support make this an incredibly comprehensive package.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★★½



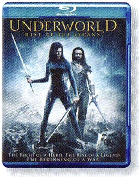
Eden Log

PRICE: $34.98 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Art house sci-fi from France, *Eden Log* is perplexing and engaging, certainly watchable, yet not entirely coherent. It's the story of an amnesiac man trying to escape a bizarre underground complex where roaming gangs of guards and mutants battle each other constantly. Mostly black-and-white and very strange, the movie is likely to leave impatient viewers cold, yet for those who like offbeat cinematic experience, it's recommended.

| EXTRAS | The only extra is the slightly shorter alternate French language cut... in standard definition. That's it. Very disappointing for a film that could have used a lot of background and explanation material.

MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★


UNDERWORLD
RISE OF THE LYCANS
THE BIRTH OF A HERO. THE RISE OF A LEGEND. THE BEGINNING OF A WAR.

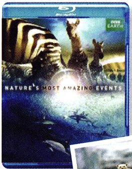
Underworld: Rise of the Lycans

PRICE: $39.95 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | The third *Underworld* movie is, in most ways, a much more coherent and compact flick. While all the movies in this series are the brain dead dreams of creepy LARPers, this prequel has less flash, and more focus on story, which makes it slightly more successful than the last two. Strangely, it actually makes vampires feel more pedestrian than usual, since apparently all that's needed to kill one is a good whacking with an axe.

| EXTRAS | Plenty of self-congratulatory making-of shorts focusing on the movie's "coolness" make up the bulk of the extras. There's also a music video if you're really bored, but the filmmaker's commentary is surprisingly, even shockingly engaging.

MOVIE ★★½
EXTRAS ★★★



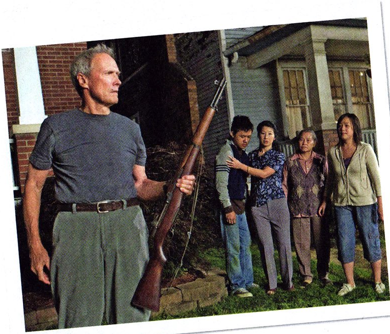
BBC's Nature's Most Amazing Events

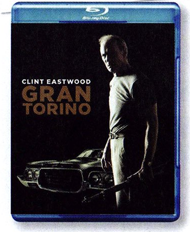
PRICE: $34.99 **RATED:** UNRATED

| MOVIE | Back in the old days, *Wild Kingdom* and the occasional *National Geographic* special on primetime were pretty much the best that documentaries had to offer. Nowadays, we have the BBC, and much like the stunning *Planet Earth* series, their latest is an amazing view of the world. While the title makes this series sound like some cheesy compilation of best-of scenes, it's new material that is both beautiful and fascinating. The HD transfer is pristine as well. Overall, another great title from across the pond.

| EXTRAS | Aside from a set-up guide, there are no extras here.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS





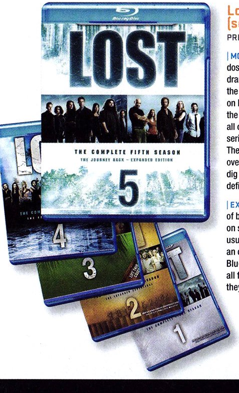
Gran Torino

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Clint's latest directorial and acting outing offers up a fairly familiar and predictable story of a cranky, racist old bastard who learns to love his ethnic neighbors. If it were anyone else, this would have been unbearable sentimentalist crap. Thanks to Eastwood's considerable presence (both in front of and behind the camera), the movie is equal parts funny, disturbing, and sad, and strikes every emotional chord with expert precision.

| EXTRAS | There's a disappointing lack of extras here—no director's commentary and just a few shorts on the background of the movie, Eastwood, and the car itself. Everything else about the pressing is pristine, but a special edition seems like a sure bet.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★


Blu-ray Disc
LOST
THE COMPLETE FIFTH SEASON
THE JOURNEY BACK – EXPANDED EDITION
5
4
3
2
1

Lost: The Complete Series (so far)

PRICE: $69.99 (PER SEASON) **RATED:** UNRATED

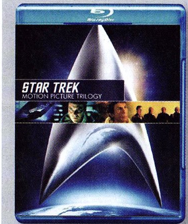
| MOVIE | For those of you who enjoy really hefty doses of narrative confusion in your primetime drama, *Lost* has been dishing out goodness for the last five years, all of which are now available on Blu-ray. The gorgeous 1080p transfer makes the show look its absolute best—and indeed, all of these discs are demo quality—and if any series is worth keeping around, it's this one. The labyrinthine scripting will have fans mulling over each episode for years and newcomers will dig seeing the show at its absolute best. This is definitely TV on Blu-ray done right.

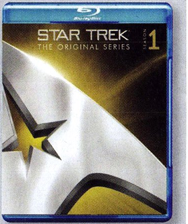
| EXTRAS | Each season offers up an array of behind-the-scenes looks, commentaries on select episodes, Easter eggs, and all the usual things fans would expect. While it's not an overwhelming amount of extras, and the Blu-ray specific goodies are rather lackluster, all four seasons give fans plenty to watch after they've blown through the episodes.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★½

STAR TREKKING... OLD-SCHOOL STYLE

Longing for the days of the old *Trek* universe before J.J. Abrams decided it wasn't good enough for modern viewers? We got you covered, fellow nerdlings.





Star Trek Trilogy

PRICE: $65.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | It's unlikely that too many people are pining for the first and fifth *Trek* movies, so the Trilogy is the decidedly better buy of the two Blu-ray compilations. Containing *Star Trek II, III,* and *IV,* these are the highlights of the original crew's '80s-era journeys. The movies look quite good, though as usual for the decade's movies, not pristine, and there's plenty of great *Trek* action across the three Blu platters. *The Wrath of Khan* stands tallest for pure sci-fi action, while *IV* is the most accessible to casual viewers. *The Search for Spock* is actually an excellent *Trek* story, but is likely to leave non-Trekkies rather cold.

| EXTRAS | All three features sport interesting commentary for fans, trivia games, and an array of making-of and behind-the-scenes videos. It's a mix of old and new content, and provides plenty of *Trek* love.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★½

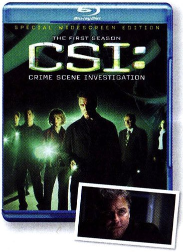
Star Trek: The Original Series – Season One

PRICE: $129.99 **RATED:** UNRATED

| MOVIE | Sure, these adventures don't actually exist any more thanks to the new *Star Trek* film, but as memoirs from an alternate dimension, they sure look and sound great anyway. The perfect gift for any Trekkie or sci-fi lover, Paramount has done an amazing job restoring these vintage beauties with brilliant colors, surprising sharpness, and, of course, redone special effects. Even better is the option to switch between the remastered and original versions on the fly.

| EXTRAS | If the beautiful restoration wasn't enough for *Trek* fans, the plethora of excellent extras is sure to put them into nirvana. There's so much extra data to peruse—trivia, a virtual tour of the Enterprise, and a ton of different documentaries on all aspects of the show—that you'll be hard pressed to run through it all. Either way, this is a terrific package.

MOVIE ★★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★★



CSI: Season One

PRICE: $89.99 **RATED:** UNRATED

| MOVIE | CBS deserves a commendation for starting from the beginning when releasing their network-saving phenomena. *CSI: Season One* is a perfect gift for newcomers and long-time fans alike, as it's probably the first time anyone has seen it in its HD, widescreen glory. Despite being almost a decade old, *CSI* looks better than ever and it's easy to see how this glitzy, stylized show started a whole new era of crime shows.

| EXTRAS | Though not brimming over with extras, there are a couple decent documentaries and even an extended cut of the pilot with commentary. Deleted scenes and a gag reel round things out.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★

Jason D'Aprile does not twit. He kindly asks that you knock it off too. Questions? Comments? Rants? Send in a note! Or better yet, a good ol' fashioned email to **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**

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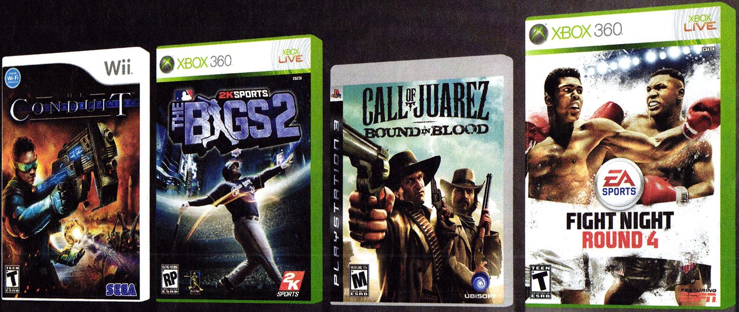
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THE BIGS 2
2K SPORTS
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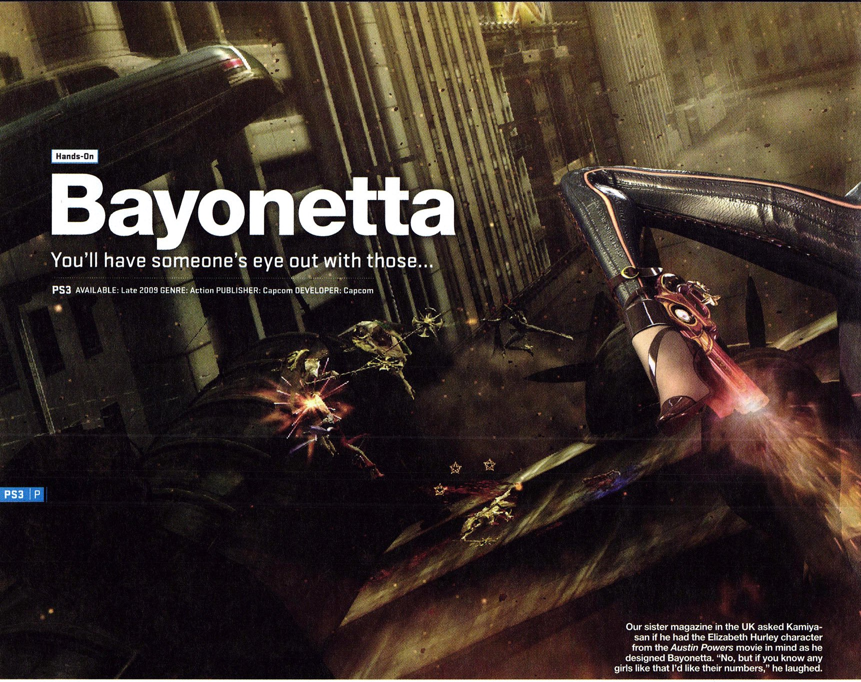


Hands-On

Bayonetta

You'll have someone's eye out with those...

PS3 AVAILABLE: Late 2009 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Capcom

Our sister magazine in the UK asked Kamiya-san if he had the Elizabeth Hurley character from the *Austin Powers* movie in mind as he designed Bayonetta. "No, but if you know any girls like that I'd like their numbers," he laughed.

When your initial gameplay video goes out of its way to perform a crotch-cam pass of the star heroine's nether regions *all the damn time,* you have to think that its explicit focus on inducing schoolboy giggles is probably hiding gameplay limitations. It's the classic T&A gambit of clouding game assessment in a veil of jiggling jubblies and virtual voyeurism. You might also call it a cheap, almost trashy attempt at capturing lowest common denominator interest.

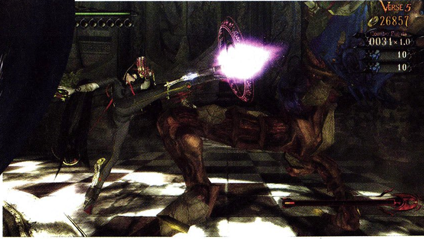
Frankly, I was put off from the outset. Now I'll appreciate the female form in its finery (or out of it) in the right situation. This wasn't it. So my expectation of *Bayonetta* as a game was of low-brow titillation and all its crazy gun-shooting, pirouetting, hacking and slashing was secondary, and even further undermined the perceived nonsensical positioning of this third-person action slasher.

And then I played it.

Just the first 15 minutes of working Bayonetta's combos and witnessing the absolutely stunning visual scenes was enough to turn my attitude on its head. First off, the environments are absolutely staggering in their detail and sheer beauty. While it's easy to be seduced by this spectacle, dazed by the color of vistas you just want to gaze at, the monstrous entities flinging magic and unidentifiable appendages in your direction are plenty enough to jerk your senses to the job at hand.

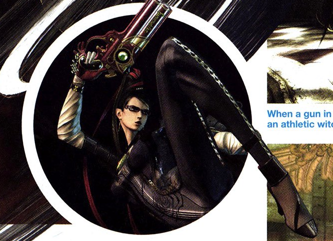
As a witch, Bayonetta has a variety of weapons at her disposal, including the guns in her high, high heels. Her combo moves are relatively simple to execute (and a training screen while the level is loading lets you try them out in safety), vital when the slew of enemies flood onto the screen and you're hacking, slashing, and

Don't be surprised if *Bayonetta* turns out to be nearly as much fun to watch as it is to play. The detail in every scene is absolutely incredible. See, knew it'd turn us all into voyeurs.



When a gun in each hand just isn't going to get the job done, where else do you think an athletic witch is going to strap on a firearm?

Location: Pub. Time: Late. Beverages consumed: Many. A conversation: "Her hair?" "Yes, her hair is the source of her power, and acts as her outfit, too, wrapping around her body." "You said her hair?" "Yeah, brilliant, right? And hot!"

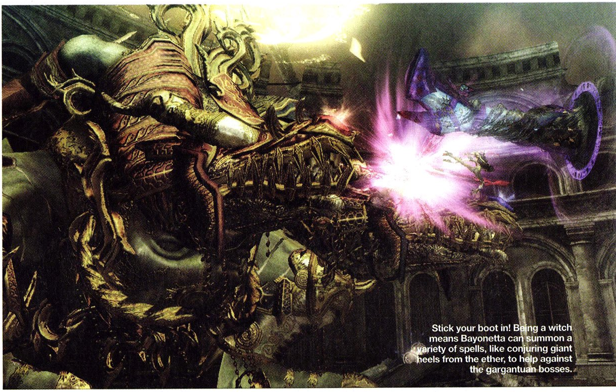


spinning on your head to elevate those heel guns and fire them at anything that moves.

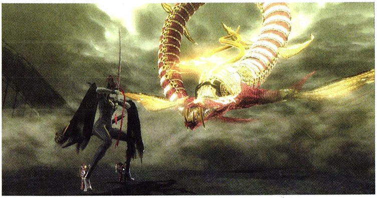
You'll probably recognize the core gameplay style. To call it *"Devil May Cry* to the power of T&A" might be fairly appropriate and also unsurprising given that *Bayonetta's* creator is Hideki Kamiya, designer of *DMC.* Does he think Bayonetta will be a cooler character than *DMC's* Dante? "They're equally appealing but in a different way," he replies diplomatically, before noting, "Dante from the first *DMC* is a very cool character." Does that mean he thinks *DMC* has gone downhill since his time in charge? "No comment!"

Sounds like she's born of quality stock

Frankly, this Bayonetta character is full of surprises. For starters, her high-brow English accent wasn't expected. Her constant innuendo—"Don't you want to play with me?"—is hardly shocking, though directing that comment at a massive octopus-armed boss is as disturbing as it is inappropriate. Plus the source of her power, somehow, is her hair. Yes, hair. It can form into giant fists, a demon dog, and various other attack powers, and since her hair also acts as her modesty keeper (wrapping around her body as the tight-fitting black outfit), when it's flailing at enemies, that's the chance to catch a glimpse of…


Stick your boot in! Being a witch means Bayonetta can summon a variety of spells, like conjuring giant heels from the ether, to help against the gargantuan bosses.

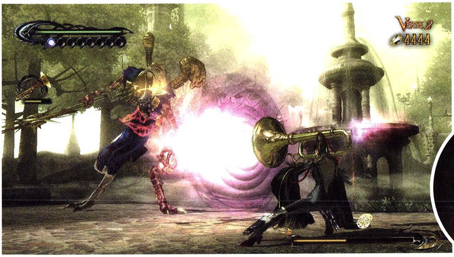
She can also transform into creatures such as a panther in order to race across these beautiful levels in pursuit of enemies. And every time she performs a double-jump, colorful butterfly wings sprout from her back to assist with the floating. Whatever the quirkiness of the power, it's impossible not to appreciate the attention to detail as the wings expand, filling the screen with stylish color as pieces drift to the ground like confetti thrown at Mother Nature's wedding.


It might look spectacular to eviscerate, but this creature is about to be diced

That detail extends to the wild variety of multi-limbed, multi-colored, and multi-sized enemies. *Bayonetta* cashes in on one of action gaming's current trends: scale. The boss monsters are gigantic, and as the camera pans out, Bayonetta herself shrinks to illustrate the vast size of a bearded giant pulling ledges apart and scrambling after the nimble, nubile beauty.

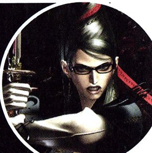
While executing the variety of attack moves and firing her weapons is surprisingly simple, defeating the bigger bosses will be as tough as you might expect in a Kayima-san game. In fact, he has stated that it will be a difficult action game in the tradition of the original *DMC*. Still, those looks, moves, and, I suppose, the cutscene camera fly-bys are likely enough to make each restart or reload less frustrating than it could otherwise be. Or maybe you could play through on the Easy difficulty setting and just drink in the spectacular visual showcase. Either way, we've little doubt that *Bayonetta* will be turning heads for a variety of reasons when it ships later this year.

Rob Smith

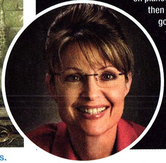


Tooting her own horn, Bayonetta uses items scavenged from the world for limited-use attacks.

TWINNERS?



Who knows what lurks in the dark Alaskan nights. Maybe portals to weird worlds. And maybe Bayonetta had a sister who slipped through that portal. And this sibling was raised in the ways of America on planet Earth. And then rose to become governor of the state, and vice presidential candidate for the most powerful office on planet Earth. Maybe there's even more to Sarah Palin than meets the eye! A joint plot by Bayonetta/Palin to take over both worlds? Believe!



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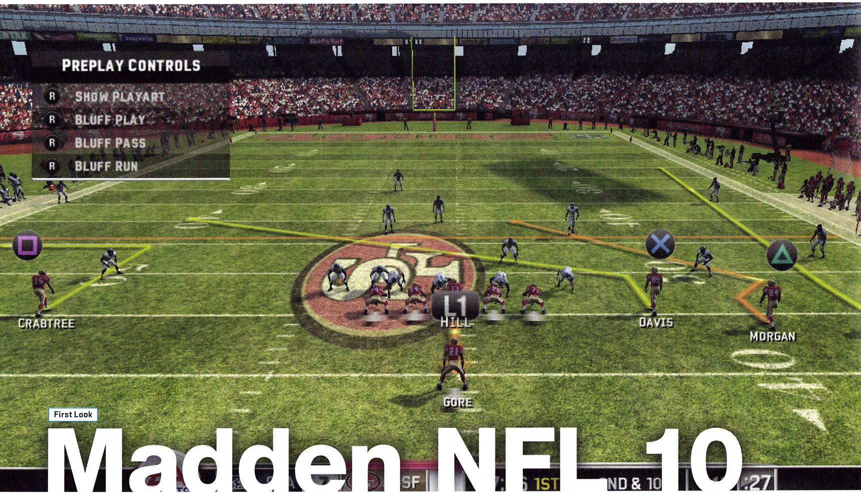


Yeah, that's Michael Crabtree out on the left, waiting for Shaun Hill to hit Square and get him the ball. Raiders, what were you thinking?

First Look

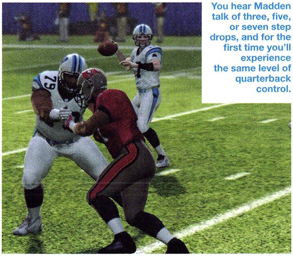
Madden NFL 10

Don't assume you know what you're getting

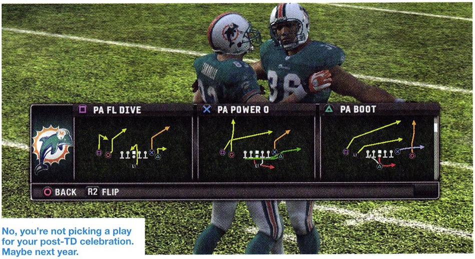
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** August 14 **GENRE:** Sports **PUBLISHER:** EA Sports **DEVELOPER:** EA Tiburon

It's kinda hard to get excited about each *Madden* iteration in the build-up to its annual release. But the past couple of years have shown that though it's the only pro football game in town, the lack of competition hasn't impacted efforts at innovation, constant improvement, and still further feature creep. "It's less about gimmicks, and to delight the core audience," says lead designer Ian Cummins of this year's advances. In adding on-field minutiae the effect is to further increase the realistic look of all the action. That means players will wear gloves and hang hand towels from their belts where accurate to the real player, and all starting quarterbacks will have their own signature animation style (the developers, like the rest of us, still don't know whether last year's cover athlete, Brett Favre will be included in Viking purple.).

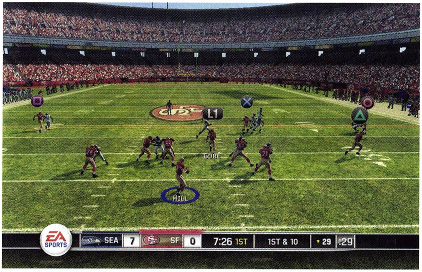
Quarterback play could feel quite different this year due to the offensive line actually dropping into a pocket, so you'll be less inclined to take the snap and drop 20 yards while you scan for an open receiver. While in the pocket you'll get feedback through the rumble effects of the controller; it will start to vibrate as the pocket



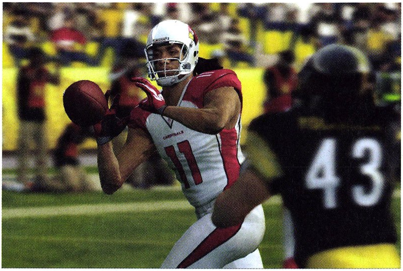
You hear Madden talk of three, five, or seven step drops, and for the first time you'll experience the same level of quarterback control.



No, you're not picking a play for your post-TD celebration. Maybe next year.



Every quarterback will be identifiable by their unique drops, stances, and throwing styles.



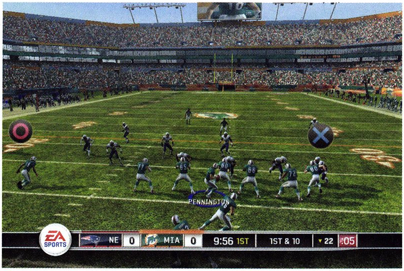
Dualing cover stars: Larry Fitzgerald and Troy Polamalu get joint top billing on this year's game box.

starts to collapse, letting you know it's time to get rid of the ball.

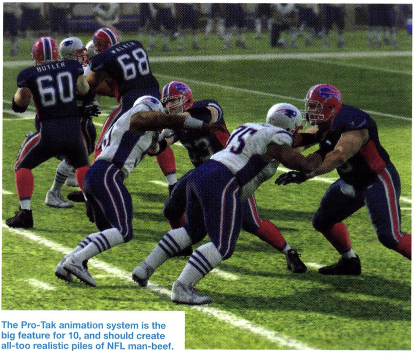
Another tweak that could certainly impact your game if you're in the middle of a big season mode is the impact of injuries. Spot a guy hobbling (and he will actually limp if he has a leg problem) and you can choose to leave him in the game at the risk of aggravating the injury. The "Play Through The Pain" feature is really a factor in the season and franchise modes, and for 2010 you'll finally be able to play a full franchise season online. You can imagine the work stoppages already, with live and fantasy drafts (through a PC or iPhone), full 32-team leagues, stat tracking, and an impressive suite of web support that lets you do all the management elements through a web browser, set rosters, offer trades, pretty much everything aside from actually playing the game.

Online play also sees the addition of a co-op mode so you and a buddy can play quarterback and receiver, for example, and communicate over a headset. Every position will be playable in this co-op mode, and each will have its own custom camera angle to give you the best chance of knowing what's going on around you.

With the usual visual clarity we've come to expect, *Madden 10* looks set to deliver again, with the full online franchise mode promising an epic time sink. Rob Smith



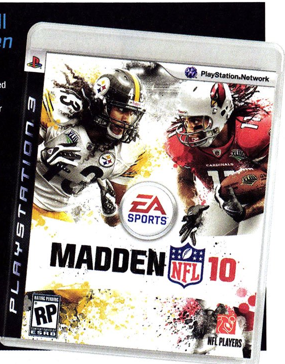
Expect more short yardage pass plays as you drop into the pocket and look to get rid of the ball as quickly as possible.

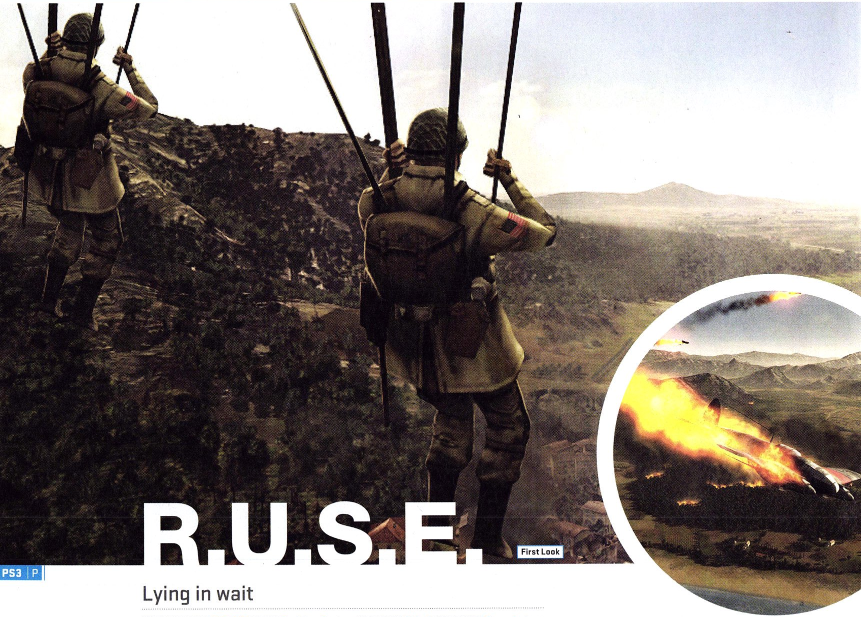


The Pro-Tak animation system is the big feature for 10, and should create all-too realistic piles of NFL man-beef.

Madden still with *Madden*

Though he's retired from the commentator's booth, John Madden has not retired from the game. So if you're missing the big guy on your TV broadcast, *Madden 10* is the place to get your fix as he provides the "Ask Madden" options in the play-call screen, providing suggestions based on your current situation. In fact, according to the *Madden* team, he's told them that since he's retired from broadcasting "he really wants to be even more involved going forward." Maybe a few less "kapows" and "BAMs" in the repertoire, but you can't knock the guy's incredible insights.





R.U.S.E.

First Look

PS3 | P

Lying in wait

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD 2010 GENRE: Real-time Strategy PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Eugen Systems

There will never be an end to war if game developers have their way. With the likes of *Tom Clancy's EndWar* and *Stormrise,* it seems like everyone is intent on revolutionizing the real-time strategy genre. *R.U.S.E.,* from French developer Eugen Systems is the latest game intent on storming the RTS beachhead and liberating the genre from the tyranny of the PC.

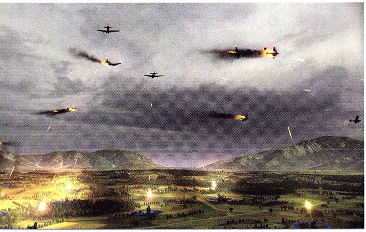
The idea behind *R.U.S.E.* is simple—huge, scalable map environments that allow you to recreate historic World War II battles utilizing a straightforward drag-and-drop system. The standout feature is the focus on outwitting your opponent with ruses—using Intel (and powerful Ruse cards) to discover what your enemy is up to and to disguise your own intentions. The end result is a game where strategy, tactics, and subterfuge are more important than how fast you can click through a spreadsheet.

The gameplay occurs in three phases, first each player picks one random Ruse card and two selected ones. Use your cards to set your plans into action; this can be anything from an Intel card that shows you the enemies plans to a Radio Silence card, which hides your units from the opponent's Intel card. Once your cards are put in play, you build bases, create units, and initiate your offensive.

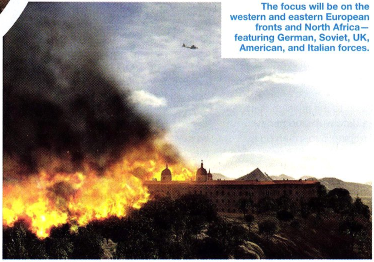
The control system (like the game's concept) is elegantly simple, requiring only a click-and-drag of a unit to direct it exactly where you want it to go. Highlighting an enemy unit instigates a battle, but uniquely, it also flashes up the enemy's strength against your own, offering a quick indication of whether it's wiser to attack or more likely, retreat.

You can win a battle either by destroying the enemy's headquarters or by racking up more points within the time limit. Points are calculated based on the money earned from your supply depots and bases weighed against unit losses. If you defeat units or capture depots you can earn even more points.

The U.S. has a strong air force, the Germans have better tank divisions, and the Soviets have more artillery.



Set during World War II, *R.U.S.E.* features a spread of the conflict's biggest and most famous battles.



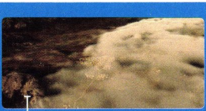
The focus will be on the western and eastern European fronts and North Africa—featuring German, Soviet, UK, American, and Italian forces.

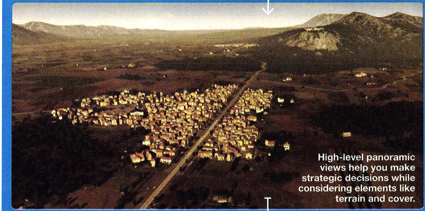
But the star of the show is clearly the highly detailed and fully destructible environment maps. Every tree, building, and feature on the map can be blown apart, which has a direct impact on tactics. For example, tanks can easily be ambushed in the narrow streets, so calling in an artillery strike to level the area is practically a prerequisite to advancing your armored units into a town. Constant and careful consideration of the tactical situation and lay of the battlefield is recommended before you press the attack—and zoom in to enjoy the resulting carnage of your command decisions.

Ian Dean

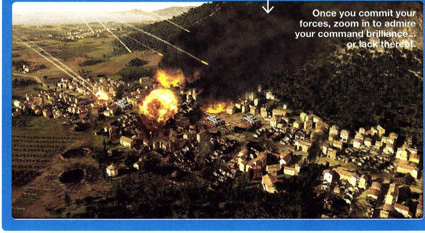
FULL-SCALE WAR

R.U.S.E. utilizes a custom game engine called IrisZoom to create vast realistically mapped locations. You can literally zoom anywhere on the map, to any height or direction. It's incredibly powerful, impressive, and actually enhances the gameplay.





High-level panoramic views help you make strategic decisions while considering elements like terrain and cover.



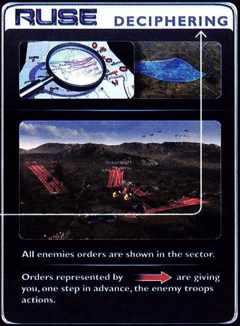
Once you commit your forces, zoom in to admire your command brilliance... or lack thereof.

IT'S IN THE CARDS

The developer cites poker as an inspiration for the game, with units presented on the battlefield like stacks of poker chips. The idea is that you can see where the enemy units are, but you'll never know what type of unit or strength they are, unless you use a Ruse card to discover your enemy's intentions.

Central to the game is the use of Ruse cards to outwit the enemy. A level-up XP system determines your deck's progression with more cards unlocked as you play.

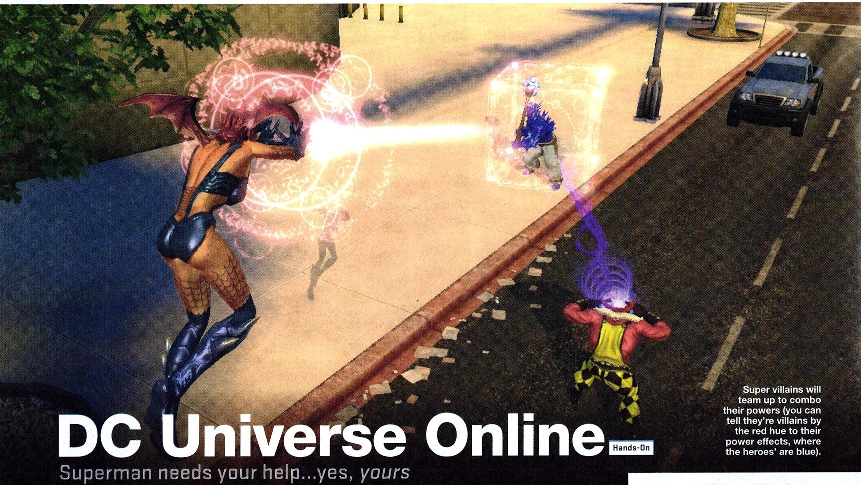
Cards are numerous and varied with each imbuing a unique attribute: a Deciphering card like this one reveals planned enemy movements, while a Camouflage Building card might disguise a factory, with a Decoy card able to fake a base or tank unit, and so on.



RUSE DECIPHERING

All enemies orders are shown in the sector.

Orders represented by → are giving you, one step in advance, the enemy troops actions.



Super villains will team up to combo their powers (you can tell they're villains by the red hue to their power effects, where the heroes' are blue).

DC Universe Online

Hands-On

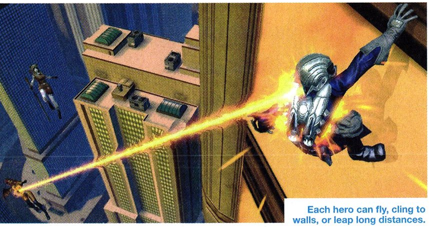
Superman needs your help...yes, *yours*

PS3 AVAILABLE: 2010 GENRE: Online action PUBLISHER: SOE DEVELOPER: SOE Austin

After revealing the plans for Sony Online's superhero massively multiplayer experience back in our October '08 issue we finally had the chance to don the virtual spandex of a handful of heroes and go to the aid of Superman. Fundamentally, what's not cool about that? While it was clear that there was still some time to go in the development process, what we saw gave us hope that *DCUO* will lead the charge of PS3-based MMO gaming.

We had set superheroes-in-the-making as the character creation format is still being kept under wraps. But there was clear diversity of options among heroic stylings and also the nature of their special abilities. Much like single-player superhero tale *inFamous* comes alive when you start leaping across the rooftops of Empire City, so the super movement powers in *DCUO* immediately give that "oh yeah" sense of superhero-ness. Three different movement styles (from straight flying to the acrobatic ability to stick to all surfaces, and a jump and leap technique that feels very similar to *inFamous)* ensure that navigating the cityscape is cool in and of itself. Partnered up with three other heroes we were able to fly and leap to the mission start point—a date with Doomsday who's keeping Superman busy.

Minions of the bad guys roamed around the streets and they needed to be handled before we could get access to the indoor area for the final showdown. It definitely took a while to figure out the control interface. You have four available powers that recharge at varying rates, and can be combo'd with powers from the other heroes into more powerful attacks. But my strength-based hero started to shine when I figured out that random cars and other objects could be grabbed and thrown! Sure, I died frequently (there was little evident penalty for dying) as our group failed to function as an effective unit, so that's going to be key to your strategy: finding friends and working together.



Each hero can fly, cling to walls, or leap long distances.

Defending the Grill to the best of this hero's abilities. Must serve tasty snacks.

But sticking with the controls and plugging away at the random goon fodder eventually paid off by getting in to fight alongside Superman. We quickly took down Doomsday, received our congratulations, and were done. Of course, we could have fought with the goons, against the heroes, protecting Doomsday, and preventing them from getting close. It was clear in this brief test that *DCUO* houses a ton of content to consume, and it's the polish that it receives that will determine how willing we are to don that virtual spandex and go crazy with the DC universe of heroes and villains.

Rob Smith

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PlayStation Gallery

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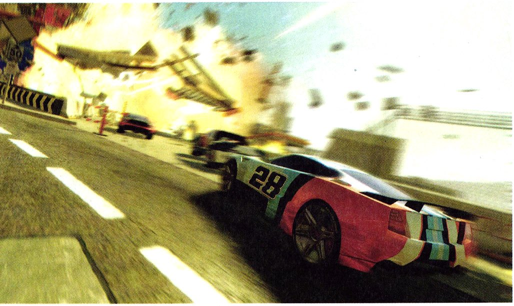
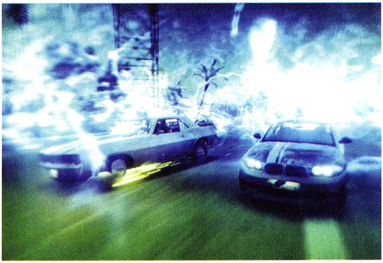


Split Second Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: Spring 2010 GENRE: Driving
PUBLISHER: Disney Interactive DEVELOPER: Black Rock

It took just three laps of one track—a handful of split seconds—to feel like developer Black Rock is on absolutely the right path with its follow-up game to PTOM office favorite, *Pure.* That one race lead to another, and another, and another, and then back for more. Each time the race played out differently, thanks to the fluidly executed destructible terrain feature. Honestly, I was concerned. *Full Auto* tried to add explosions to a racer but came up short, but this team seems to have it figured out.

As you drift, overtake, and bump any of the other 11 racers on the track you fill a meter that lets you trigger environment-changing events ahead or even behind you. Blue icons indicate basic triggers, like exploding barrels, windows, and other features that you can time to disrupt your opponents' racing line. Trigger the red icon environment changers and then the fireworks really fly. After driving through an airport terminal on lap one we blew out all the windows on lap two, and then triggered an effect that brought the house down, creating a new slalom route through the previous straightaway. It looked spectacular, it worked effectively, and in every race I finished in a different position based on my understanding of the racing line and opponents' uses of their powers. Very good times, and as the lead designer told me they still had a year to go for polish. With extensive focus testing planned, we really expect great things from this new racer. Rob

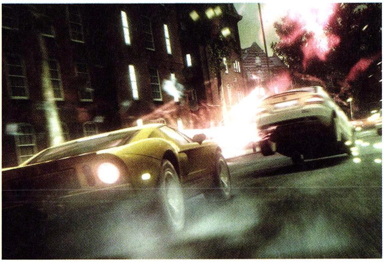


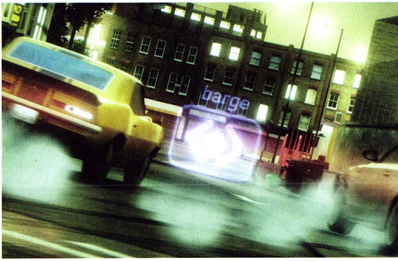
Blur First Look

PS3 AVAILABLE: Late 2009 GENRE: Driving
PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Bizarre Creations

Fun, intense, and inclusive. Those are the three tenets behind the new racer from the studio that created the *Project Gotham Racing* franchise on that other platform. With the aim of rewarding competition over racing precision, *Blur* looks incredibly flashy with colorful visuals lighting up even the dour-sounding Hackney power station racetrack. The fun should come in the power-ups that give you boosts and the ability to shunt sideways cars that you might be neck-and-neck with down the home stretch. Aside from the real-world locations (Hackney in London, Barcelona, and Tokyo have been mentioned so far) and licensed cars, the unique campaign progress using social networking model should be fascinating. With a focus on getting you into competition with other racers (up to 20 cars on the track at once), it seems there will be serious encouragement to find friends and plan races, with the theory that the story can evolve in some dynamic fashion as players use the in-game interface to create their own groups and track confrontations.

Promised four-player splitscreen play is a really cool addition for those in-the-same-room racing nights. And namesake band, *Blur*'s "Song 2" positively has to appear on the soundtrack! Woohoo! Rob





MX vs. ATV Reflex First Look

PS3/PSP AVAILABLE: Late 2009 GENRE: Driving PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Rainbow Studios

Welcome to Rhythm Racing 2.0, the physics engine powering the latest addition to the *MX vs. ATV* series. It brings with it real-time terrain deformation, so those muddied ruts on the racing surface will remain and even change throughout the entire race. With 12 racers on the track at once, the theory is that the racing line could evolve as you seek out flatter terrain. When matched by the new control technique that puts the ATV and the rider control on separate analog sticks, it creates a freshly dynamic experience. You have to balance your rider leaning with the motion of the ATV to keep on line, and with the changing terrain, that's a constant challenge. It may take a little time to get the hang of this, but should be rewarding in the various game modes promised.

Free Ride challenges require you to collect items and perform a variety of fun stunts (wheelies, air jumps, the usual parade of don't try this at home antics). The Free Style mode has judges decide the quality of your ride, your stunts, how much track you use, and overall style. Bribery is likely not an option, so mastering the new control scheme will be job one when this fun-looking racer ships later this year. Rob

NFS Shift Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: September GENRE: Driving
PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: Slightly Mad Studios

Need for Speed goes sim. That's the message we felt loud and clear after a recent brief play test. Cop chases. Gone. Semi-naked models. Gone (darn). This is about racing fast cars—like the McLaren F1, Nissan sports cars, and even old classics—on a range of real and fictional tracks. In comes a cockpit view to help reinforce the fact that you're at the wheel of a high performance vehicle. Getting a handle on the redefined racing model and track layouts might take casual *NFS* players some time, but for a more hardcore group, this is likely the return to simulation that they've been waiting years for.

The developers certainly have a simulation pedigree, forming this studio after working on popular PC sims *GT Legends* and *GTR2*. The look was very, very solid and the frame-rate will be locked at 30fps for smooth speed through the twists and turns. Hitting solid objects was certainly jarring as the screen blurred, creating a realistic disorientation as you get your bearings having gone from 60-plus to zero in a heartbeat.

It's certainly a refreshing change for the franchise, sure to appeal to car fanatics, but possibly leaving the more casual *NFS* crowd in its dust. Rob

PlayStation Gallery

Darksiders: Wrath of War Hands-On

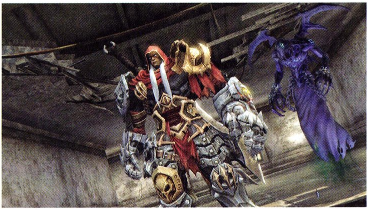
PS3 AVAILABLE: TBA 2009 GENRE: Action Adventure
PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Vigil Games

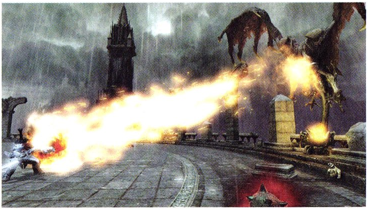
At the beginning of *Darksiders: Wrath of War,* the world ends. This is, of course, bad. Not so much because humankind has been wiped from existence, but because you—War, one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse—weren't responsible for making it happen, but all the blame-emitting heavenly fingers are pointing at you. Your only shot at redemption: figure out who started the party without you, and beat the sin out of them.

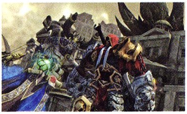
This epic third-person action beat-'em-up will involve puzzle-based exploration through grim dungeons teeming with all manner of hellish adversaries, followed by the devastating annihilation of said adversaries in *God of War*-influenced combat, complete with QTE finishing moves, absurdly large weapons (of both the melee and projectile variety), and the occasional magic spell.

As you progress, you'll unlock new combos and abilities (as well as a few useful allies) to aid you in your ass-kicking—often by collecting the souls of those you've killed and bartering with a demon for various items and upgrades such as "shadow wings" that allow you to glide. Eventually, you'll even earn a horse…naturally.

In our hands-on time, we battled our way through a series of visually striking environments—from a decimated metropolis to a rain-slick cathedral—and ripped apart angels and devils alike. We traipsed through a river of blood, stole a griffon from an archangel, and tore the wings off a particularly nasty bat-demon. This Armageddon is mighty stylish, and THQ senior VP of creative Danny Bilson insists "we're not shipping it 'til it's awesome." Scott



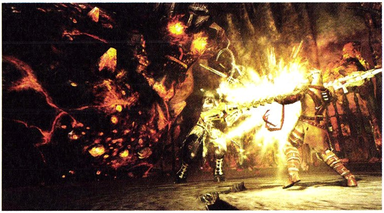


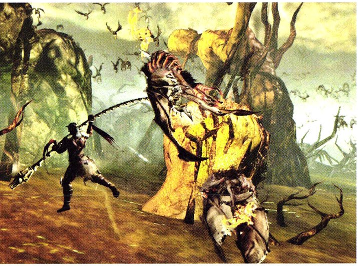


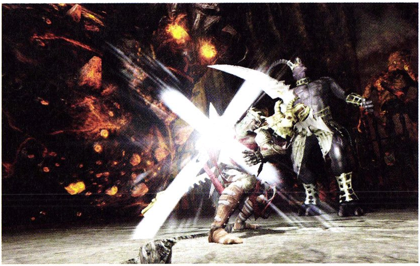
Dante's Inferno Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: Spring 2010 GENRE: Action Adventure
PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: EA Visceral Games

While we played the same level we did just a month ago—Dante's journey on the back of the ferryman, mounting a walking fire-breathing demon after stabbing its previous jockey through the head, and quick-time event leaps across crumbling caverns—it's still a fascinating slice of behind-the-scenes game progression to see the same thing improved so significantly in such a short amount of time. The spectacular graphics were even crisper. The control was tighter. The boss battle against Minos blended solid action moments with quick-time events that turned into one of the most grotesque eviscerations we've ever witnessed. Powerful stuff. The poem? Yeah, it's in there, but it will take further playthroughs to see how effectively Executive Producer Jonathan Knight and his team implement the source material into what's shaping to be an eye-popping experience in so many ways. With so much time still to go in development, *Dante's Inferno* gets more fascinating by the month. Rob





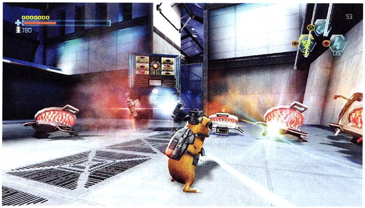


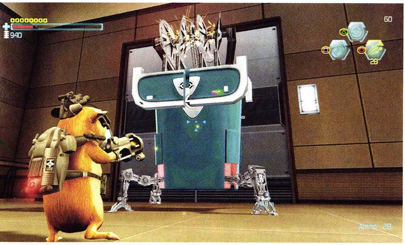
G-Force Hands-On

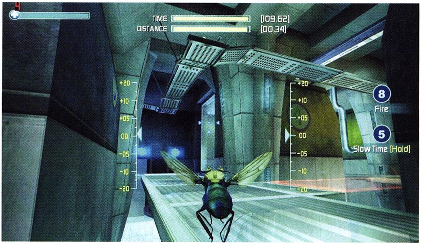
PS3 AVAILABLE: July 25 GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: Disney Interactive DEVELOPER: Eurocom Ent.

Ass-kicking, gadget-wielding guinea pigs. Oh. Yes. You may know of *G-Force* from the upcoming Jerry Bruckheimer-produced movie that mixes the animated antics of cute but deadly rodents with live action actors and situations. *Alvin and the Chipmunks,* but with guinea pigs and guns. The upcoming game based on said movie will clearly be aimed at the family-friendly audience, but it's notable for two main reasons: 1) the animation on the guinea pigs is really pretty amazing. Now maybe I'm just a sucker for the crinkling of a furry nose, but damn, it looks good, and when I "died" while floating in mid-air, the limp body was uncomfortably realistic in appearance. But not to scare the kids—there's no real dying! And 2) like the movie it supports 3D, so if you're one of the 20 families with a stereoscopic TV you'll be able to take full advantage of the two pairs of 3D specs that come packaged in each PS3 game case.

The game itself is a blend of puzzles that might need some difficulty tweaking for the younger set, and combat against the electrical implements that have gone crazy in this world (like those evil flying electric razors, the bastards). Somewhat unexpectedly, anticipate this one rising above standard expectations of kid-friendly licensed-movie fare. Rob





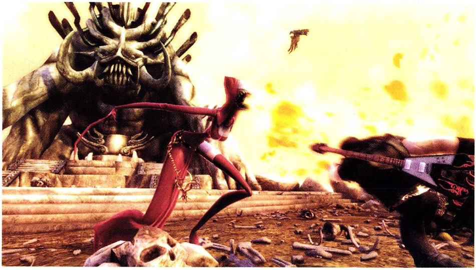


Brutal Legend Update

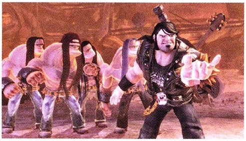
PS3 AVAILABLE: Rocktober 25th GENRE: Action/Adventure
PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: Double Fine

Guaranteed: You will laugh. Every journo in the room laughed genuinely and heartily right on cue while watching the latest unveil of Tim Schafer's gaming love letter to heavy metal culture. Judas Priest front man Rob Halford's General Lionwhyte, resplendent in big, BIG hair, full make-up, and oh-so-y'know *je ne sais quoi* brought the house down. So now we have confirmed Jack Black playing lead hero Eddie Riggs, Lemmy from Motörhead, Halford, and Lita Ford.

The open world gameplay is the real surprise under this visually resplendent metal album cover come alive. You go where you want, follow the instructions you choose, command armies of headbangers, construct stages for big shows, combine porcupines with deer for a deadly mount…yeah, there's a lot. A fun surprise, the Runaways (Schafer said the name would be changed so as not to upset serious missing young kids organizations) are young girls who jump on your shoulders and use their lighters to ignite your projectile bolts so they do more damage. You can see where it's going, and we can't wait to see Eddie's Face Melter solo power actually, y'know, melt faces. Rob



START A REVOLUTION
NOW OR LATER

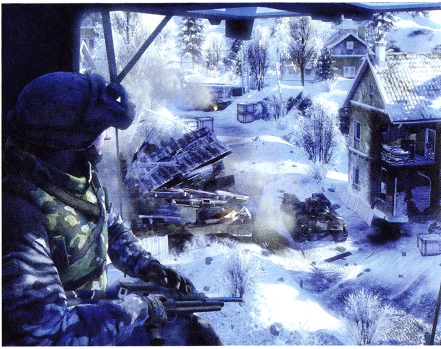


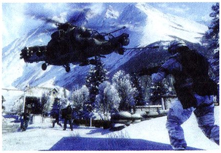
PlayStation Gallery

Battlefield: Bad Company 2 Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q1 2010 GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: DICE

Oh, they're on to something here. The original game was a surprisingly adept shooter, full featured, and with better written (and delivered) dialogue than most mainstream Hollywood action movies. According to senior producer Patrick Bach this sequel will build on that outperforming original with greater vehicle authenticity so that they look, feel, and play like the real things. And you have so many to choose from across the new range of missions. You'll use them to bring down buildings with an unprecedented level of destruction as your team romps across the countryside. Their missions, residing outside the constraints of regular military regulations, will occur in a sandbox-style environment, but you can be assured of a return to the genuine witty dialogue and situations that look like fun but turn into crazy shootouts with lead, shrapnel, and masonry flying in all directions and those handy red barrels providing the ideal target for your bullets. With some time still before its early 2010 release, we're hugely expectant that DICE will live up to our now raised expectations. Rob



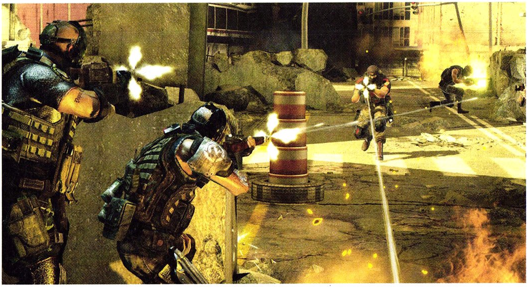


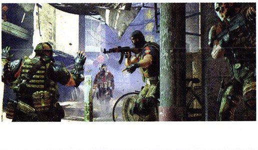
Army of Two: The 40th Day Hands-On

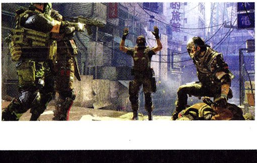
PSP AVAILABLE: Late 2009 GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: EA Montreal

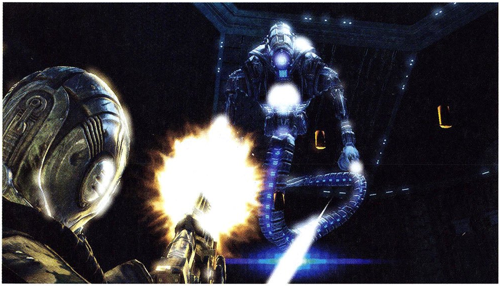
Gamers with friends tended to like the original *Army of Two.* If you could find a live body to play through the campaign, you'd probably elicit way more fun than Johnny NoMates fighting awkward AI buddy movements as well as the well-armed enemies in a solo quest. That might also be the case for this sequel, but largely because the co-op experience appears to be so intricately tuned to encourage Messrs. NoMates go find like-minded cohorts.

On the streets of Shanghai you'll witness devastating events as buildings crumble and terrorists place hostages on the brink of execution. This will force your two highly-trained combatants into a series of tactical and moral choices. That's right, aside from using your buddy's position to tag targets so that *you* can "see" them through solid walls, or viewing their sniper rifle view as a picture-in-picture cam on your own screen, you'll make key decisions that affect the life and death of civilians. Separate paths through the destruction force effective communication, so it's clear you need to bring along someone you like! Rob









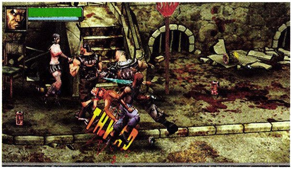
Dark Void Hands-On

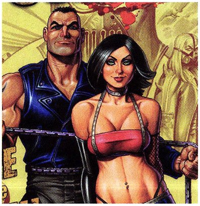
PS3 AVAILABLE: Holiday 2009 GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Airtight

Hanging off the bottom of a rotating ledge. Needing to leap upwards. Aiming as you spin. Keeping a bead. Trying to hit a target that's mostly invisible but also leaping with precision across these platforms. It's head mangling, thumb-twisting, and bizarrely compelling. You're looking for the "X" alerts that mean a quick button press will jettison you to the next highest ledge. You're looking for those transparent floating bad guys that keep popping you with plasma every time you poke your head out from the cover provided by the platforms. And still the scene is spinning.

And that's just a part of the indoor environmental challenge in what appears to be a very ambitious action game from Capcom. Outside you can power up your jet pack, hijack aerial vehicles to target anti-aircraft batteries… well, the variations appear myriad and, well, complex.

Mixing and matching indoor and exterior sci-fi situations produces a wide variety of technical challenges for the developer, Airtight. They're confident (naturally) that gamers will adapt to the "pro flying" techniques required to hover, jet to targets, and even get out of trouble in indoor arenas. On first experience, it ain't easy, but given the variation of environments, and desperate hopes that the control system empowers rather than frustrates, *Dark Void* could be a dark-horse quality entry in the competition-packed action genre. Rob





Unbound Saga Hands-On

PSP AVAILABLE: July GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: Vogster Entertainment DEVELOPER: Vogster Entertainment

An early example of what will surely become the norm once the next version of the PSP releases, *Unbound Saga* is a UMD-less game that will only be available via PSN download. Based on the forthcoming, similarly titled comic book from Dark Horse, the gameplay is pure side-scrolling brawler in the *Final Fight* vein. What differentiates the game is its distinctive comic book art style (each battle area is a comic book pane and the artist's hand visibly draws-in new enemies to fight) and the ability to strategically switch between main characters, Rick Ajax and Lori Machete. Our hands-on session revealed a satisfying array of moves and interactivity with the environment, but a hope for more fluid character control via the analog-stick before the game hits the streets. Roger

JULY 2009
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A Clash of

PS3 | Available: 2010 | Genre: RPG | Publisher: Square Enix | Developer: Square Enix

Two months ago, Teresa Dun traveled to Japan for hands-on time with a trial version of *Final Fantasy XIII.* This month, she heads back again, to spend a weekend cozying up to Square Enix developers and talking about Summons, how the battle system has changed since the trial version, and why the world of *FFXIII* isn't what you were initially led to expect.

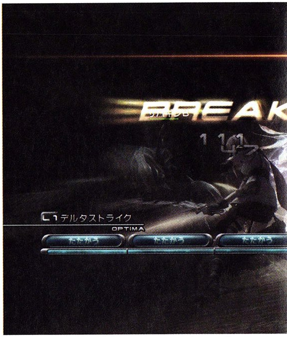
Destinies…

and Time Zones

By Teresa Dun

WHO'S TALKING?

Director Motomu Toriyama (above) and Producer Yoshinori Kitase (below) kindly answer my questions about *Final Fantasy XIII.*



HEIGHTENED ANTICIPATION
SATURDAY, 12:10PM (PACIFIC STANDARD TIME)
SAN FRANCISCO AIRPORT

My seatbelt's buckled, tray table's locked, and my carry-on's tucked beneath the seat in front of me. My anticipation's sky high, like the plane will soon be, carrying me across the Pacific on a last-minute trip to Tokyo, Japan. Though why, I'm not sure yet.

Square Enix called the PTOM Towers earlier in the week to offer us a private demo of the latest on *Final Fantasy XIII.* Just a teaser, they warned. Sure, but after so many years of painful silence regarding all things *FFXIII*—a silence that wasn't broken until my trip a few months ago—even this tiny trickle feels like a flood. (But the storm's brewing, I tell you, and when it hits, PTOM will be there.) Still, an exclusive demo right in the belly of the Square Enix offices? How could I refuse?

So two nights after I got the call, I checked the weather in Tokyo, packed my bags, and booked a cab to the airport, ready to learn whatever I can about the latest installment to the most famous JRPG franchise of all time.

OH, ODIN
MONDAY, 5:00PM (JST)
SQUARE ENIX HEADQUARTERS

I arrive at the Square Enix offices just as the sun is starting to set. We're meeting so late because the developers spent the day in a voice recording session. As I enter a conference room, someone hands me a printout of several screenshots. I flip through them—the Shiva sisters battling alongside Snow, the Shiva sisters pirouetting into enemies, the Shiva sisters in motorcycle form. Stunning, in terms of both the amount of detail and the sisters' sultry physiques. But then, I reach the last screen and my eyes widen.

Standing with her sword drawn is Lightning… and towering behind her, in the exact same pose, is Odin, her Summon. "You're the first person in the world to see that, besides Square Enix employees," Akio Ofuji, Senior Publicity Producer, tells me. "We haven't even shown it to the Japanese magazines yet."

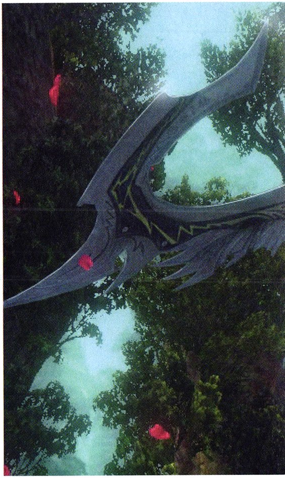
Something about the positioning of Lightning and Odin evokes a dozen questions. I ask the most pressing one, "Are they…connected?"

Motomu Toriyama, director of FFXIII, answers. "Yes, each of the l'Cie will have their own Summon, and the Summon will be related to the l'Cie powers of that character. It's kind of like their pet Summon."

"So only l'Cie will have Summons?" I ask. I put two and two together—both Lightning and

➔

> "You're the first person in the world to see [Odin], besides Square Enix employees," Akio Ofuji, Senior Publicity Producer, tells me. "We haven't even shown it to the Japanese magazines yet."»



WHO, WHAT, WHERE, HUH?!

FFXIII's got enough factions to make your head spin, so here's the lowdown. There are two important locations. The first is an uninhabited (and inexplicably frightening) planet called Pulse. The second is an artificially created satellite that floats above it, called Cocoon, and that's where the cities and people are. But the same mysterious forces influence both settings: Crystals and their servants, the fal'Cie. Who's good? Who's bad? At this point, who knows?

Crystal: Crystals influence their surroundings, but beyond that, they're enigmatic. Oh, and one other fact: Crystals have varying strengths and sizes. Whether they all have the same will—or indeed, any will at all—remains to be seen.

サハギンB
642
317
ATB 0/4
ライトニング ATK 960
TP LV 2
スノウ ATK 2040
ヴァニラ BLA

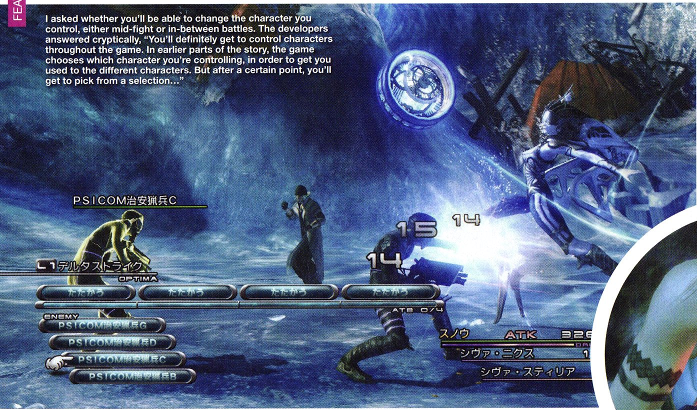
Battles will look and feel dynamic. "We wanted to make the visuals impactful," the developers say. "We want players' excitement to build up so when they see an important moment, like when an enemy Breaks, it feels good. It's all about the cinematics, making sure the battle's being portrayed in a way that delivers maximum excitement."

Also, they say, the same attacks may look different throughout battles. "Firaga is Firaga, but depending on whether it's airborne or on land, it'll have different effects. The visuals of the battle change a lot depending on the combination of the other attacks.

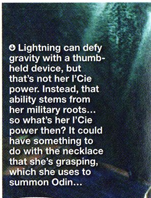
fal'Cie: "A fal'Cie is a representative of a Crystal," explains producer Yoshinori Kitase. "There're various types of fal'Cie. For example, the one that lives inside Cocoon uses the power of the sun and is kind of the protector of the light. There are others out in the field and they're protectors of the green and nature. The fal'Cie aren't exactly 'beings.' Maybe you can call them more like objects of deity. In the setting of *FFXIII,* there are too many fal'Cie in existence to count. Just a handful of those are related to the story of Lightning, though."

l'Cie: The l'Cie are individuals who've been marked by the fal'Cie to fulfill a particular (and as yet unrevealed) destiny. They gain their powers from the fal'Cie. They're seen as enemies, because word on the street is that the l'Cie will destroy Cocoon, and no one wants their home destroyed. And that includes the l'Cie. Lightning and Snow are apparently both l'Cie, as are the rest of their crew, most likely. None of them are necessarily happy about the destiny that's been chosen for them.

PSICOM: This is Cocoon's army. PSICOM is seen as protectors of the people of Cocoon and enemies to the l'Cie. Lightning and Sazh both have military backgrounds. They were probably both members of PSICOM at some point. A resistance group called Team Nora is trying to take down PSICOM.



I asked whether you'll be able to change the character you control, either mid-fight or in-between battles. The developers answered cryptically, "You'll definitely get to control characters throughout the game. In earlier parts of the story, the game chooses which character you're controlling, in order to get you used to the different characters. But after a certain point, you'll get to pick from a selection..."



Lightning can defy gravity with a thumb-held device, but that's not her l'Cie power. Instead, that ability stems from her military roots... so what's her l'Cie power then? It could have something to do with the necklace that she's grasping, which she uses to summon Odin...

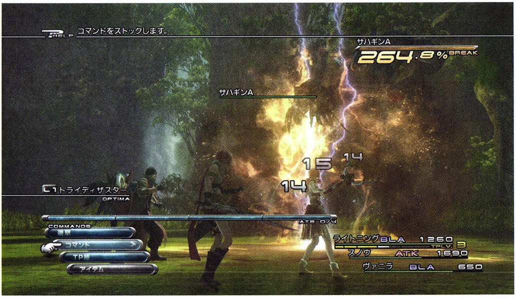
自分の身だけで一杯な

"The sisters gracefully move toward each other, intertwine their limbs, arch backwards, and transform into a motorcycle."

Snow are definitely l'Cie, then. [Don't know what "l'Cie" means? See page 43 of the Who, What, Where sidebar.] Toriyama explains that even the l'Cie won't be able to use Summons right away. "Being able to call a Summon is one of the abilities of the l'Cie, but there's an evolution the characters have to go through story-wise first. It's not until their level as an l'Cie advances that they'll be able to call a Summon. Once activated, the Summons stay until they take a certain amount of damage. If you work around that and strategically fight in a way for them to receive the least amount of damage, they'll fight alongside you for a longer amount of time"

I press for more info: how do you call a Summon? What's it like when they fight? Why are the Shiva sisters sometimes a motorcycle, and does that transformation occur inside or outside of battle?

Instead of answering, the developers boot up a build (just minutes old, if their pleading glances at the PS3 are any indication) and *show* me.



There are moments when two of your party members attack consecutively, or even simultaneously. According to the developers, "Your AI party members can come in with good timing and create a combination attack, almost by luck or accident. But there's a certain way that players can 'influence' the AI even though they only have direct control over one character. These combinations can become more of a strategic thing. That's all we can say."

SUMMONS IN ACTION
MONDAY, 5:45PM (JST)
SQUARE ENIX HEADQUARTERS

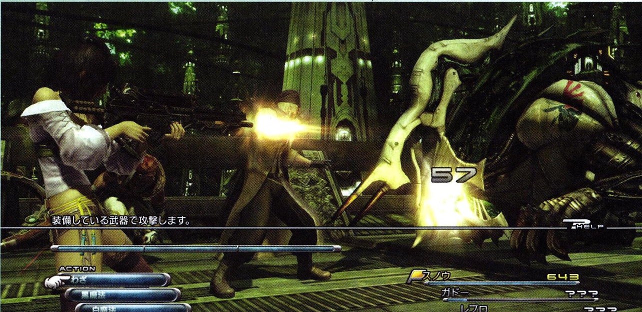
Snow and two members of his resistance group, Team Nora, are in a battle with soldiers of PSICOM. [Check the sidebar on page 43 if you're confused about the plot.] The developer controlling the demo taps a few buttons—it looks like he accessed a "TP Command" submenu and chose "Summon," though it's a bit too fast to know for sure—and suddenly Team Nora disappears. Snow summons Shiva, a pair of tall, sophisticated, deadly sisters.

As they fight alongside Snow, the two sisters appear to have unique attacks (many of them ice-based, though sometimes a sister thrusts a tire-shaped limb at an enemy, hinting at her other form). It looks as though the sisters are AI-controlled, the way Team Nora was in the trial version I played a few months ago. Suddenly, with button presses (purposely) way too fast for me to decipher, the developer at the helm activates Shiva's secondary mode. The sisters

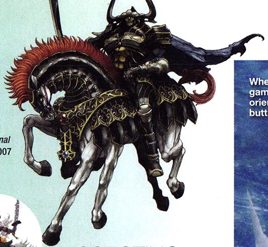
WAIT, THERE ARE TWO BEHEMOTHS?

WHAT'S THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE ENEMY DESIGN?
"Well, there are a mix of enemy characters from previous titles and also brand new ones," explains developer Toriyama. "But it's more than that. You see, different fal'Cie exist within different environments, and there's this Crystal in the center that affects what type of monsters are in each environment. This isn't something that's overtly explained in the game, but in some areas, monsters will have a certain design that's affected by one type of Crystal, and in other areas, they'll be designed a different way. A specific example is the behemoth, who's a regular in the series. Depending on the type of area he appears in, he has different designs affected by the different fal'Cie that exists in those environments. So there's a Type A and Type B behemoth."

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?
"There's a Pulse version and a Cocoon version. The one in Pulse is a little bit more wild. He's in nature. And the Cocoon behemoth is a little bit more mech-oriented. The behemoth that appeared in the trial version is the Cocoon version."



装備している武器で攻撃します。



Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII, 2007

Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings, 2007

Final Fantasy IX, 2000

Final Fantasy VII, 1997

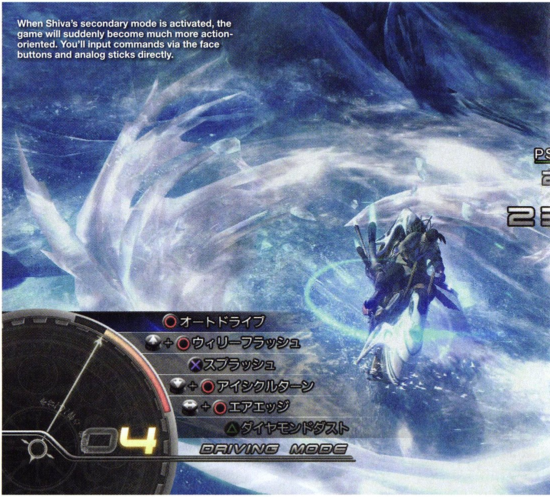
Final Fantasy VI, 1994

DISSECTING ODIN

"Use your imagination to think of what Odin will be like," producer Yoshinori Kitase and director Motomu Toriyama humbly request instead of giving concrete info about the newly announced Summon in *FFXIII*.

You got it, guys. Here are the facts: Odin has appeared in every main *Final Fantasy* game starting from *FFIII*, except for *FFX*. (Though he's only mentioned in *FFXII*, he appears in *FFXII: Revenant Wings.*) Odin wears an antlered helmet and mounts a six-legged horse. He uses either a sword or a lance, and his trademark attack is the one-hit instant killer, Zantetsuken.

In the screenshot on page 43, Odin dons his usual antlered helm and wields a sword, so there's a good chance Zantetsuken will be one of his attacks. As for what ride he'll turn into? My guess is a six-legged horse. It's thematically distant from Shiva's mechanical motorcycle, but who knows, maybe the horse will be made of metal and robot bits instead of flesh and blood.



When Shiva's secondary mode is activated, the game will suddenly become much more action-oriented. You'll input commands via the face buttons and analog sticks directly.

> "I ask what "TP" is, but they just smile and shake their heads, promising more information soon. How frustrating!"

At the end of the Japanese trailer I saw, Snow is about to confront a fal'Cie when Lightning runs in ahead of him. Snow shouts to her, "older sister!" So… are Snow and Lightning blood siblings, or do they share some other connection?

gracefully move toward each other, intertwine their limbs, arch backwards, and transform into a motorcycle. It's magnificent to see the animations in action! Snow then hops onto the newly formed bike.

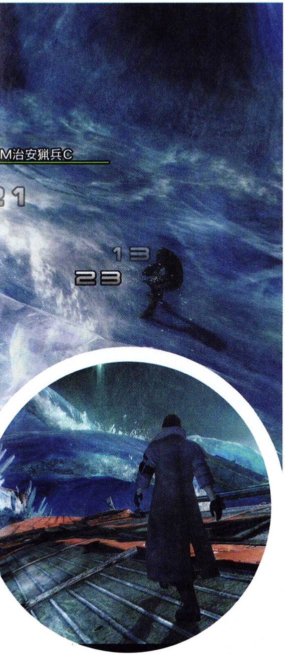
In this new mode, the command menu disappears, replaced by a timer, a numerical countdown interface, and a list of commands activated by the face buttons and analog sticks. The developer taps a few commands—both the timer and the numbers go down—and Shiva wheels forward to attack the enemy.

"How do you activate this driving mode?" I ask.

Producer Yoshinori Kitase answers apologetically. "We can't reveal actual details, but let's just say certain conditions will have to be met, and then you can select the driving mode."

Not about to be deterred, I ask, "How does the driving mode work, then?"

This, he answers. "Basically, it switches from the command-oriented battle system that you experienced in the earlier modes. When you activate the driving mode, you directly enter different combinations to attack the enemy. So it becomes a more action-oriented experience. It changes the mood of the game."



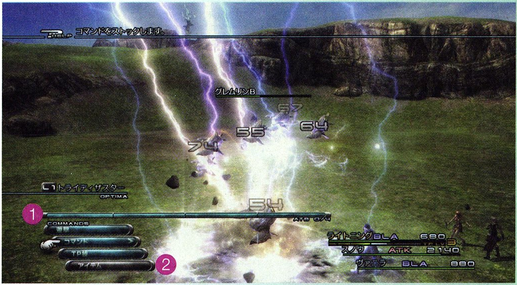
I watch as Shiva wheels into an enemy. "How often can you use this driving mode?"

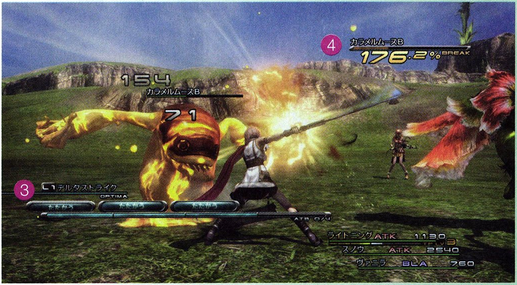
Kitase and Toriyama discuss for a moment, before Kitase answers, "We're still balancing certain elements so we can't say for certain, but you won't be able to use it all the time. Certainly not every battle. You'll have to gain more TP. It's a special attack mode that can only be brought about once in a while."

I try to ask what "TP" is, but they just smile and shake their heads, promising more information soon. How frustrating! So instead I ask about Odin's fighting style and Kitase only drops a single clue. "With Shiva, she turns into a motorcycle. That's a running thing with the Summons, they maybe turn into some kind of ride. If you could just use your imagination to see where that could go…"

And that's that, according to the developers. But little do they realize that I took their advice to heart [see the Dissecting Odin sidebar].

JUICY NEW DETAILS ABOUT THE UPGRADED BATTLE SYSTEM





① **ATB Gauge (with more Segments!)**
You won't use Magic Points in *FFXIII.* The whole MP system has been replaced by the segmented ATB gauge. Each spell and skill is assigned a certain number, and that's the number of free ATB gauge segments you'll need to have filled in order to execute that move. Remember, you can choose to input attacks as soon as a single ATB segments fills up—or you can wait for it to fill completely, then unleash a torrent of stronger (and potentially linked) attacks.

② **Skill List**
This is the list of commands you'll be able to input. If you access the Skills option, you'll be able to pick from skills like Attack, Thunder, Thundaga (a more powerful version of Thunder which hits more enemies), and so on. Expect to see *Final Fantasy* staples Firaga and Steal as well as perhaps some new skills.

③ **Paradigm Shift (that's what it says in Japanese)**
This is pure speculation, but from the clues the developers have given, you can only directly control one character at a time during battle. My guess, though, is that you can give the other characters a "role" to play in battle, such as "healer" or "aggressive melee attacker." But I also think that you'll be able to change their roles during the middle of a battle, thereby "shifting" the "paradigm."

④ **Chain/Break bar**
As characters—both you and your AI party members—chain attack onto an enemy, he'll eventually Break. An enemy in Break mode will be weak and susceptible to attacks, and you'll have more options against him, like literally tossing him into the air before blasting him with Thundaga.

WIDE OPEN TERRAIN
MONDAY, 6:40PM (JST)
SQUARE ENIX HEADQUARTERS

Since they've already got the level loaded, the team decides to show me some new spaces, two on Cocoon and one on Pulse. The first one's on Pulse. Lightning runs through a canyon—the textures look rich and fantastic—and suddenly she bursts into an open plain. Green and brown dancing in sunlight, as far as the eye can see (let me emphasize that the space feels enormous), with tall plateaus bordering the plains in the distance. From my perspective, it looks open, with little to force you along a linear path.

Clouds float idly by in the sky, and I even see Cocoon, a grey sphere with a huge chunk missing from it. It looks as though it were hit by

CREATIVE CHARACTER INTERPRETATION

Courtesy of characters from *FFVII* through *FFXII*

So only a handful of trailers and demos have been released for *FFXIII.* Big deal. That's more than enough info to perform some "educated speculation" on what Lightning and company are potentially like. Using characters from past games to highlight key characteristics, here are my creative interpretations of the cast of this latest *Final Fantasy.*

Lightning

=

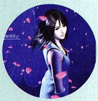
Squall Leonhart from *FFVIII* (cold, distant)

+

Vincent Valentine from *FFVII* (calm, badass)

Vanille

=


Rinoa Heartilly from *FFVIII* (sweet, flirty)

+

Rikku from *FFX* (smokin' hot bod)

Snow

=

Wakka from *FFX* (laid back)

+

Balthier from *FFXII* (cheeky smile)

Sudz

=

Zell Dincht from *FFVIII* (comic relief)

+

Cid Highwind from *FFVII* (age: past adolescence)

Silver-haired Boy

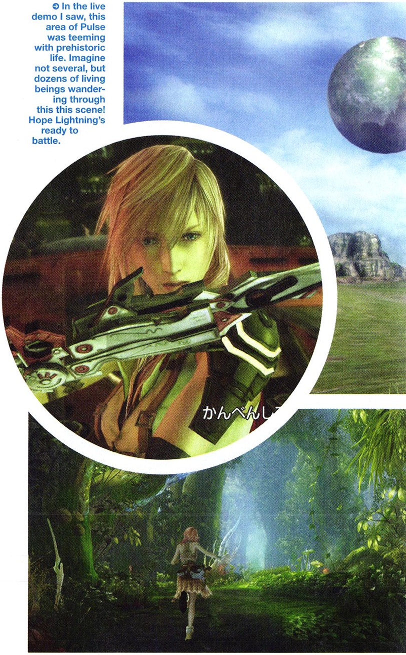
=

Yuffie Kisaragi from *FFVII* (mischievous, young)

+

Vivi Orunitia from *FFIX* (short)

➲ In the live demo I saw, this area of Pulse was teeming with prehistoric life. Imagine not several, but dozens of living beings wandering through this this scene! Hope Lightning's ready to battle.



➊ Believe it or not, this is on Cocoon, the artificially created asteroid floating above Pulse. Who knew that a man-made jungle could look so lush, wild, and convincing?

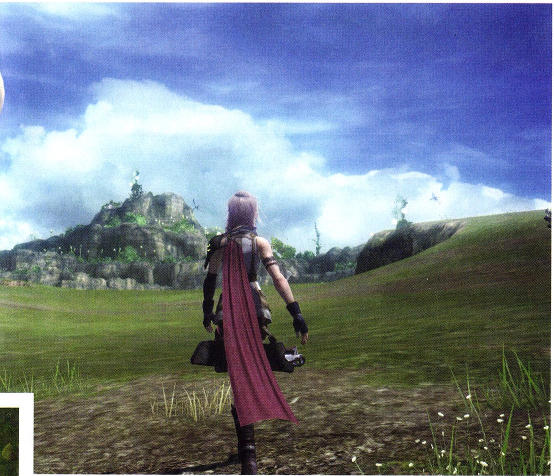
an asteroid, and I wonder whether that's the way Cocoon was made or if the crater was the result of some catastrophe.

But the most striking feature: the plains are teeming with life. Overflowing with it. Reptiles and plants of all different sizes, some creatures solo and some in groups, stomp and crawl, all with a distinctly prehistoric flavor, and there's even primordial goo. And. It's. Just. Epic. The engine renders the movement beautifully, and the scene before me comes to life as the developer proudly jogs Lightning through it.

One of the developers explains, "We wanted to show a more open field area to contrast what was shown in the trial version, where it was a closed space, very mech-heavy. These fields are heavily populated with monsters. Players can engage in a lot of battles. There are tons of monsters…even some really large ones."

Next, they load up a level on Cocoon, and

"Some creatures solo and some in groups, stomp and crawl, all with a distinctly prehistoric flavor"



immediately I exclaim, "This is Cocoon?!" Because in front of me is a jungle! A shadowy, exotic-looking jungle with misty lighting, large tree roots entangled in dirt, and fruit bushes laden with a succulent orange fruit. Vanille skips (literally! how adorable!) through puddles and leaps across large tree trunks, with Sazh close behind her. At one point, she passes a beautiful waterfall. At another, I glimpse a resort-worthy beach shining in the background.

The path here seems a lot more linear, and I imagine in the final release it'll hide treasure chests (or in this game, treasure spheres). The developers finally respond to my initial outburst, clearly happy, "Yeah, this is Cocoon. Cocoon has a lot of different types of areas, kind of like Earth in that sense. But it's not as natural as a planet would be. It's very man-made, and care is taken to make it look a certain way."

With that, they show another area. This time, Lightning runs through a field, the archetypal kind with long grass and flowers blowing in the wind. "We wanted to show that Cocoon does have a separate, more open field area," they continue. Mission certainly accomplished!

I ask one more question before we move on: how much of the game will take place on Cocoon and how much of it will take place on Pulse?

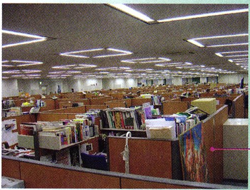
Their answer: "It's entirely up to the player. If someone wants to go through the story and get to the ending right away, they'll probably spend the bulk of their time on Cocoon. But if they want to get into all the battles, collect all the items, and work on leveling up, they'll probably spend a good portion of time on Pulse, too."

MARCHING FORWARD
MONDAY, 7:30PM (JST)
SQUARE ENIX HEADQUARTERS

After a tour of their office and a few last questions about the battle system (see page 47), the developers and I leave the Square Enix headquarters and head for a nearby crab joint (where they promise to introduce me to crab sashimi, sweet potato ice cream, and crab tempura).

As I step out of the building I carry with me two new emotions about *FFXIII:* awe at how beautiful the game is (the Summon animations and the new areas are simply breathtaking!) and a burning curiosity to learn more details about the battle system and the story, which the team told me they're looking forward to revealing soon.

So if the battles and the story still seem a bit ungraspable to you, that's the way the developers want them to be. For now. But it doesn't matter: new details will emerge in time. What does matter, though, is that the game is shaping up amazingly. Already, the settings, the dynamic combat, and animations evoke the kind of eye-widening wonder you hope and pray each new *Final Fantasy* title will bring. Now, we sit and wait for Square Enix's next phone call, when they'll treat us to more gritty details. ■



13 NEAT FACTS ABOUT SQUARE ENIX HEADQUARTERS

13. It's cramped.

12. So cramped that if I were 50-pounds heavier, I wouldn't be able to fit through some of the walkways. (The shortcuts, near the columns.)

11. Even though it's cramped, it's strangely quiet. I heard a few murmurs, but my footsteps were louder than people's conversations. (Yikes!)

10. All of the *FFXIII* crew (except the CG team) work in that room.

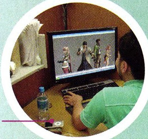
9. You have to take multiple elevators to get to the *FFXIII* room. One to the 12th floor to check in at their lobby. Then take that same one down to the ninth, walk around a corner, and take a separate elevator to get to the floor where the *FFXIII* developers are. I won't divulge the actual floor.

8. Producer Yoshinori Kitase's cubicle is the exact same size as everyone else's! No corner-office-with-a-view here, it seems. At least, not amongst the developers. Though Kitase's cubicle is at a corner.

7. They've got no kitchen, only a refrigerator. (The developers usually walk to one of the many nearby restaurants for lunch.)

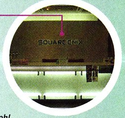
6. Employees are shy! So shy, they wouldn't turn to the camera while I snapped their photos!

5. As you can see, people's desks are clean and tidy. (Wish I brought a photo of *my* desk. Someone might faint.)



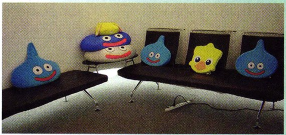
4. Developers' cubicles are lined with Square Enix merchandise. I lost count of how many *Final Fantasy* plushies I saw.

3. It's got a lobby that would make any *FF* nut drool.

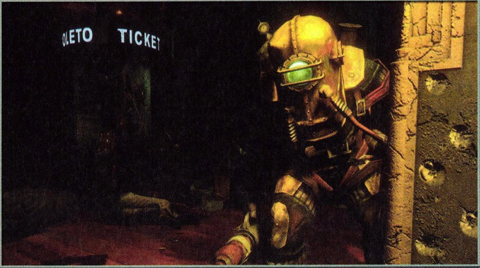


2. The receptionists wear cute, striped uniforms. Too bad they were too shy to stand still for a picture.

1. When no one was looking, I squeezed the chocobo pillow in the waiting area! *Kweh!*



www.fileradar.net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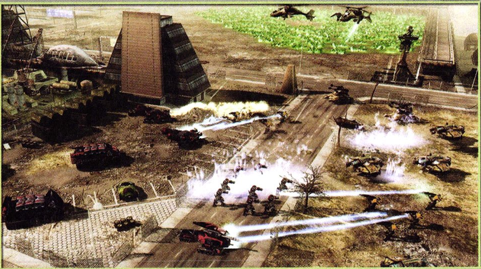

PATCHES

EXPAND GAMIN

fileradar.

This is the premier, next-gen game links site, built for the community by the community. FileRadar not only puts the power of game file distribution in your hands, but lets you feedback to save everyone a load of time and grief. It takes the power of a site like Digg and applies it to the most essential part of games you're either actually playing or want to play:

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PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION

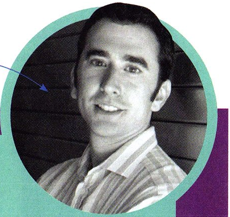
THE DEVELOPERS (PART TWO)

Back in the April '09 issue of PTOM, as we delved into the game state of our PlayStation union, we uncovered many more PS3 games in development than we imagined. That meant tons of developers beavering away to bring the next next-generation of games to a PS3 near you. So last issue we delved inside those studios to see what they were working on, and investigate the internal culture that shapes their products. Turns out there are a lot of them!

We got great insight into the inner workings of so many studios that we've extended it to a second installment. Want to know what it takes to create great games? These are the people doing just that, telling their own tales, and giving you the inside info that might help with *your* resume!

NAUGHTY DOG

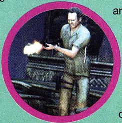
As described by Evan Wells, Co-President



CULTURE

Regular company events: Every Wednesday, we get one of our local restaurants to cater in a lunch for the whole studio. We have regular happy hours. A bunch of the "Dogs" play basketball during our lunch hour once a week, just about every week. We also have a yoga instructor come in twice a week. Thursday evenings we have a model come in so that our artists—and anybody else who wants to attend—can hone their figure drawing skills.

It's also become a regular company event to have the entire studio play multiplayer *Uncharted 2!* We play every day for at least 30 minutes to help our programmers and multiplayer designers by giving them real world data to work from. Each day we focus on a different mode to not only test the network functionality, but to also make sure that the gameplay is tuned to sweet perfection. After each session a lot of us get together to give the designers feedback on what worked and didn't and, in keeping with the Naughty Dog spirit, we're not afraid to tell each other when something sucks. It's this openness and direct, cross-discipline feedback that helps push everybody to achieve more.



In the fridge: We have two fridges actually! One stores all the lunches various Dogs bring in on a daily basis, along with some condiments and I think I actually saw a beer or two in there the other day. Our other fridge has milk and creamer for coffee and tea and stays kind of empty until Wednesday rolls around when it stores all of the leftovers from our regular catered lunch.

Employee reward programs: We have a random drawing every day where one of the Dogs wins their pick from a sizable assortment of PS3 and PSP games, movies, and various Naughty Dog and *Uncharted* merchandise. We also make a point to have a company meeting and embarrass—I mean award—Dogs that have been at Naughty Dog for the long-haul with a nice glass award they can throw into their pool or put on their desk.

Most played game in the office: The obvious answer is *Uncharted 2,* especially multiplayer! And a lot of innovation is coming out of the more obscure and independent games, so they're a great source of inspiration too. However, we try to keep ourselves focused on the task at hand (making great games!) around the office, and if we want to get together and game as a group we usually head home and jump online to get our game on.

Unique traditions: We've always had a tradition of having at least one dog in the office. Right now, we have Pogo, my French Bulldog, and [Co-President] Christophe's Bichon Frise, Trumpet. And when they're in on the same day they both leave so exhausted from chasing each other around that they can barely wake up the next morning!

Strangest/coolest item in the studio's office: We have a ton of really cool stuff gathered from various events like E3 for all of the games we've made. A few of the cooler items are the pillars and totems that we had custom made for our *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* behind-the-scenes shoot we had at the LA Arboretum. And if you want to go way back, we even still have some of the original props used when making the 3DO classic *The Way of the Warrior!*

Best way to get a job at your studio: The best way is to apply for a job! You can do that on our website, NaughtyDog.com. If you generally have the qualifications we're looking for in a particular position, we'll seriously consider you. It's not all about what's on paper, we select our candidates through interviews, their portfolios, and individual tests that we've been using for years. There's a particular mix of talent, ambition, and personality that we're looking for that you'd be hard pressed to find on paper—you wouldn't be able to guess some of our most talented Dogs just based on their resume.

The best advice I could give anybody considering to work for Naughty Dog is to not be shy, just take the plunge and apply for any of our open positions you think you're suited for.

What studios/titles do you most admire? The list is long and distinguished, but the awesome part is that we have great relationships with all of these studios in one way or another: Insomniac, Ready at Dawn, Guerrilla Games, Media Molecule, Sucker Punch, Santa Monica Studios, Infinity Ward, and Bungie.

411

LOCATION Sunny Santa Monica, California

YEAR FOUNDED 1986

# OF EMPLOYEES Over 100 and growing

STUDIO MOTTO
"Don't f*** around!" or "No bull****!"

GAMES *Crash Bandicoot* series, *Jak and Daxter* series, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

Our programmers are continually finding ways to take computationally complex tasks off of the PPU and move them over to the SPUs, which allows us to drastically improve the quality of the game while maintaining a smooth frame-rate. With *Uncharted 2,* we've only just now managed to keep all of the SPUs busy 100-percent of the time, but every week our engineers are finding better ways to optimize and pipeline the code to get even more performance out of the PS3. This trend is only going to continue as we become more familiar with the hardware and I'm quite certain that there is going to be an even bigger improvement between each game we produce for the PS3 than we were able to achieve between each game on the PS2. Effects that we never thought were practical on *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune,* we almost take for granted now on *Uncharted 2.* Things like screen space ambient occlusion and per object motion blur were pipe-dreams last game, and now they are so important to the overall look, I can't imagine living without them.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

As you may have guessed, Naughty Dog's focus is *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves.* The original game was one of the brightest moments among PS3's early release slate, with solid adventuring backed by some well written and expertly delivered dialogue. The result? Huge anticipation for Nathan Drake's next adventure...and now with added multiplayer!

UBISOFT SHANGHAI

As described by Stanislas Mettra, Creative Director - *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs,* Wang Ming Jie (Studio Communication)

411

LOCATION Shanghai, China
YEAR FOUNDED 1996 (It is the first world-class game production studio in China with full creation and production capacities)
# OF EMPLOYEES about 430
STUDIO MOTTO "Those who sweat together, stick together."
GAMES The studio produced games mainly for the Chinese market at first, although you might remember *Brothers in Arms: D-Day* for PSP. It gained greater notice in the West with *Tom Clancy's Pandora Tomorrow* on Xbox in 2004. While *Beowulf: The Game* didn't do anybody any favors, successful games such as *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter, Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent,* and *Tom Clancy's EndWar* have improved its visibility considerably.

CULTURE

Regular company events

PARTIES AND CELEBRATIONS: As an international team, the studio respects and cherishes both eastern and western cultures. We celebrate traditional Chinese festivals such as Moon festival and Chinese New Year, and we organize parties for Christmas and other western celebrations too.

SHARE TIME: One of studio's internal communication programs aiming to promote and encourage knowledge sharing within the studio. Speakers are either experts from specific fields of game development or someone who has attended important industry events.

NEWSLETTER: The bi-weekly e-article to help people understand what's happening in the studio and introduce them to current industry news/trends.

STAFF CLUBS: This Employee caring program aims to enrich the staff's leisure time and build up team spirit. Currently we have seven staff clubs for badminton, basketball, photography, rock climbing, soccer, table tennis, and tennis. Two new clubs—board games and life-drawing—are planned.

In the fridge

Fresh fruit, soy milk, coffee (four kilos a day) and seven types of tea!

Employee reward programs

STAR EMPLOYEE AWARDS: We have Star Employee Awards for those who have outstanding performance or significant contribution to projects. So far we have set seven awards for different aspects of staff performance and their working result, they are:

BEST OVERALL CONTRIBUTION: Without whom the project would simply not be successful.

BEST LEADERSHIP: Who showcased great leadership in the team, demonstrated good sense of caring and management skills.

GREATEST QUALITY-FOCUSED: Who has been doing a really high quality job whether map, texture, design, piece of code…

BIGGEST DEDICATION: Who's always here, always pushing to make things faster, better, deliver more than asked.

HELPFULNESS: Who is willing to help others. Anytime you had a problem, s/he is the one you turn to for help and answers.

TALENTED NEWCOMER: Who has less than two years in the industry; a quick learner, great potential, dedicated to the tasks.

PROBLEM-SOLVER: Who is able to find the right solution to tricky, heavy problems and save the day.

And every year the best-dressed members of the studio win a special prize—last year it was a Nintendo DSi!

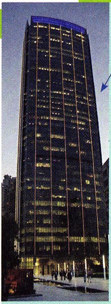
Most played game in the office

Split between *Wii Sports Tennis* and *Warcraft 3.* We also have a "Play Zone" in the studio with all the hot games.

Unique traditions

Team Karaoke nights out… Better stick to developing games.

Strangest/coolest item in the studio's office



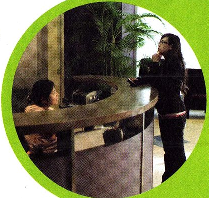
ZOMBIE SAM FISHER STATUE: Traditional marketing full-size statue of Agent Fisher in action pose, unfortunately he's been discolored by the sun and turned green.

UBISOFT PAPER CUP: After we launched the "Friend to the Environment" campaign where the entire studio pledged to stop using disposable paper cups and switched to Ubisoft branded mugs, those paper cups with the Ubisoft logo on it have become someone's limited edition collection.

VIOLENCE BEAR: You can see violence bears everywhere, although they're assets owned by employees themselves, no doubt they're the superstars in the studio.

Best way to get a job at your studio

Explore "the best way" and "strong practices" for different positions on our recruitment website: www.creatorsofmotion.com.



Studios/Titles you most admire

Valve, BioWare, and Rockstar North are our heroes.

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

Ubisoft Shanghai started to work on the PS3 a while ago with games such as *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter, EndWar,* and now *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs.* We have to admit, the very different architecture of the PS3 was challenging at first, but it was soon clear that it was an incredibly powerful and pioneering platform that introduced many engineers to distributed programming, the current and future standard. This is this same architecture that forces you to rethink your work, opening your mind to new development areas and gameplay possibilities using SPUs rather than stick to well known solutions. That's also a reason why most developers now target the PS3 as their main platform.

We also believe that with teams getting a real handle on the architecture and the PS3 tool sets reaching maturity now, the next wave of games are going to surpass everything that you have seen so far.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Ubisoft Shanghai will take a slight detour from the *Tom Clancy* franchise with work on the children's book/movie, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs,* and the "disaster survival" game, *I Am Alive.* It has plans for a couple more "extremely secret projects." By showing its diversity with both kids games and a first-person perspective survival game in which the main goal is to avoid conflict and just survive, Shanghai could bring greater depth to Ubisoft's—and PS3's—line-up this year and step out of the shadow of Ubisoft Montreal and Paris.

OTHER OCEAN

As described by Deirdre Ayre, Studio Head

CULTURE

Regular company events: We're a social bunch. We gather for movies, lunches, games, dinners, poker, and drinks—you name it. We don't have a schedule for it. Anytime, anywhere.

In the fridge: Nevermind the fridge, our cupboard is the place to be. It's fully stocked with popcorn, granola bars, snack cakes, and cookies. Our counter is lined with fruits, bagels, and nuts for the more health-conscious among us. But wait! The freezer—fudge sticks and ice cream bars!

Unique Traditions: Our wrap parties with game-themed cakes and *Rock Band* rock-offs!

Most played game in office: Probably a split between *WoW* and *Left 4 Dead* at the moment. Our St. John's studio is pretty competitive when it comes to *Street Fighter IV.*

Strangest/coolest item: We have a four-foot standee of *Halo's* Master Chief wearing Christmas lights around his neck. He guards the programming section when no one is there—along with our tenacious set of goldfish.

Best way to get a job: Have some talent and/or experience and bring forward a positive attitude. As a studio, we are friendly and social—we want employees who can complement our group and keep that feeling going. If you can find PEI or Newfoundland on a map, that is also helpful.

Studios/titles you most admire? *Spore,* for empowering the player. *Puzzle Quest,* for innovating a new genre hybrid. Media Molecule for embracing user-generated content.

411

LOCATION Charlottetown PE Canada, St. John's NL Canada, Emeryville CA
YEAR FOUNDED 2007
# OF EMPLOYEES 65
STUDIO MOTTO "Work hard, play hard."
GAMES Until recently, Other Ocean was a division of Backbone Entertainment. Backbone recently shipped *Super Street Fighter II Turbo Remix, 1942: Joint Strike,* and *Commando 3: Wolf of the Battlefield,* each of which drew acclaim for playability and remaining true to the original titles. With PSN downloadable games becoming a larger and more influential aspect of the PS3's prowess, "little" games such as these are increasingly valuable and help broaden the system's appeal.

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

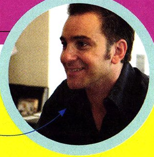
Well, our studio is pretty new and has yet to officially ship a PS3 game but we do come from working on a number of PS3 titles as individuals, so we're going into it eyes wide open right now. We are definitely benefiting from coming in late, as a lot of the kinks and methods for approaching the platform are more documented and available. For starters, the hardware really is pretty powerful when used the right way. At first, it's a bit awkward, and it probably wasn't the best approach, architecturally speaking. The hardware should enable engineers to create great games quickly and efficiently. It took some time for that to happen on PS3. But the PS3 has a lot of tricks up its sleeve. It seems more malleable. Sony is more willing to go out on a limb or change the way it deploys games or technology. Sony has a great in-game microtransaction system, some cool stuff coming down the pipe for networked games that integrate the experience with more social applications online—really convergent thinking. That's all very exciting.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Other Ocean couldn't reveal too much about its upcoming game (for instance, it wouldn't provide the name), but we do know it's a game in the Online Playground genre. According to Mike Mika, Studio Head at Backbone Entertainment, the title enables "users to access the world from a variety of devices, and generates its content procedurally as well as supports user generated content. It encourages users and their friends to create and explore in a persistent playground, deep-rooted in adventure and classic storybook fantasy."

EA MONTREAL

As described by Alain Tascan, General Manager



CULTURE

Regular company events: Beer and cake twice a month.
In the fridge: Milk and Maple syrup
Employee reward programs: iPods
Most played game in the office: *NHL 2009*
Unique traditions: We have a TLC department (tender loving care)
Strangest/coolest item in the studio's office: Big *Spore* monsters and a fake Formula 1 car
Best way to get a job at your studio: Being passionate and honest.
What studios/titles do you most admire? Epic with *Gears of War,* Infinity Ward, and everything Nintendo.

411

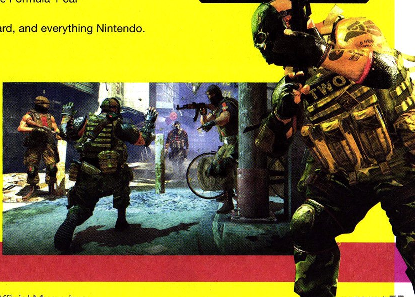
LOCATION Montreal, Canada
YEAR FOUNDED 2004
# OF EMPLOYEES Close to 300
STUDIO MOTTO "Respect and love the gamer."
GAMES A relatively new studio for the publishing juggernaut, with approximately nine games under its belt, including two original titles, *Army of Two* and *Boogie,* plus games like *NHL 07* and *SSX On Tour* (PSP), among others.

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

PS3 is a platform of tremendous power—when you learn how to harness it correctly. While the early effort to use all of the PS3's processors was mostly focused around rendering, recently more and more typical CPU centric algorithms have been parallelized to great advantage. In particular, it is animation processing that benefits greatly when parallelized. Getting there is not easy, as one has to resolve multiple complex data structures/data pathing problems. Online is where a lot of the future efforts are concentrated—PS3 has become an extremely strong online contender and it is in this space where you find a lot of challenging engineering, production, and design problems.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

EA's Montreal studio has a handful of sequels and new titles on the way in 2009 and beyond. *Army of Two: The 40th Day* follows the original with a release date of winter 2009. The studio is expected to announce a few more titles at this year's E3. If *Army of Two: The 40th Day* can work out AI issues in the single-player game and increase the fun factor for the two-player co-op, this sequel will provide a unique and compelling experience for buddies.



ZIPPER INTERACTIVE

As described by Brian Soderberg – President and Co-founder, Mike Gutmann – Vice President, and Tony Iuppa – Director of Production

CULTURE

Zipper is a laid back northwest studio that strives for openness in all aspects of development. The management structure is fairly flat allowing all staff members to provide input in any area of interest. The management team constantly provides information to the studio in all areas so that the team is fully informed and stays focused on the studio and game-specific goals. The flow is two-way with a balance of top-down and bottom-up approach to design and communication. The team works hard and plays hard.

Regular company events:

» Quarterly meetings in the basketball court: We gather the entire 150 person staff together once every three months and share information with everyone such as what went well this quarter, what we need to work on, new project ideas, game demos, etc. It's a great time to make sure the entire studio is on the same page for what happened last quarter, and what the future holds for Zipper.

» Zip Commit (Zipper Committee): Representatives from each department gather feedback from their teams and meet bi-weekly to discuss current issues, concerns, help plan group activities, etc.

» Bootcamp!: In the spirit of our military game efforts, Zipper offers rigorous daily exercise breaks (with trainers) for its staff. I've overheard more than once, "Wow, I almost puked!" from a few that take their training very seriously.

» Other Zipper Events: Cruises, billiard parlor parties, movie openings, bowling, whirly ball, basketball, family picnics, creative competitions, game night, weekly witty caption contests to name a few.

In the fridge:

Whatever we served the entire studio the night before. We use a catering company that delivers hot food serving up only the best for the staff when they work late into the evening for critical upcoming milestones.

Employee reward programs:

We reward employees through individual and group recognition. When a team goes above and beyond, they plan an out of office event. Individuals are recognized with gift certificates, Zipper swag, etc. through their managers and directors.

Most played game in the office:

MAG: OK, this is partly due to the fact that we're currently developing *MAG,* but we also enjoy playing it and are very competitive with our fellow staffers. Beyond that, we've recently poured hours into *Killzone 2* and *Resistance 2.*

Unique traditions:

Our annual Zipper Golf Tournament where the Zipper Team tees off and goes out to demonstrate why they are programmers, artists, and designers instead of professional golfers.

Ah, yes, ship parties... With all the water around here in the Pacific Northwest, we actually do have "ship parties"—I mean literally. They're a blast!

Strangest/coolest item in the studio's office: 50-foot tall *SOCOM* character hanging on the wall in our basketball court.

Best way to get a job at your studio: Resumes submitted through jobs@zipperint.com are reviewed within a few hours of receipt. If you are applying for a creative position, please include an updated portfolio. If you are applying for a technical position, samples of your code are very helpful.

What studios/titles do you most admire:

» Naughty Dog – *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* looks great!

» Guerrilla Games – *Killzone 2* is an amazing piece of work.

» Sony Santa Monica – The *God of War* series.

» Sucker Punch – Love their new *inFamous* PS3 title.

» Insomniac – Great titles with *Ratchet & Clank* and the *Resistance* series.

411

LOCATION Redmond WA
YEAR FOUNDED 1995
# OF EMPLOYEES 150
STUDIO MOTTO "Balanced Design, Art & Tech for AAA titles." Also "Making games that *we* want to play."
GAMES *SOCOM: US Navy Seals, SOCOM II: US Navy Seals, SOCOM 3: US Navy Seals, SOCOM: US Navy Seals Combined Assault, SOCOM: US Navy Seals: Fireteam Bravo, SOCOM: US Navy Seals: Fireteam Bravo 2*

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

ONE PROCESSOR, EIGHT ADDITIONAL PROCESSING UNITS, AND SOMETHING CALLED A "REALITY SYNTHESIZER."

It arrived under veil of secrecy, this new oversized prototype unit, its fan roaring like a restroom hand dryer. It was plugged in and promptly took the entire network down. More units soon followed, eventually growing smaller, noiseless. We poked and prodded them, finding that eight additional processing units might actually mean something more like seven and that we might just have to loan one of those to the system.

But we bought in—wholeheartedly. We saw the potential. We created an "SPU Bootcamp" and had each and every engineer go through this course. We learned that getting our code onto these SPUs was not so hard at all. And yet, none of this really prepared us (well, not all of us) for just how fast, how amazing, these SPUs really were. It's sort of like the Grand Canyon. You can see it in pictures, in movies. You can read about it, hear people talk about it, but you're never going to really get it until you find yourself standing smack in the middle of it.

With each new bit of code moved to the SPUs came a renewed sense of awe. A vertex shader that cost a hundred cycles when run on the GPU at 500 MHz was no match for five little SPUs tearing through vertices at 3.2 GHz and a cycle count of only eighty. We saw the beauty of allowing these SPUs to crunch polygons into submission before feeding them, in delicious little bites, to the GPU.

We found that bottlenecks on the main processor or GPU could just be offloaded to the SPUs, an almost limitless source of free processing power. You could leverage only 10-percent of the SPUs potential and find massive gains for your system.

This is the system under which we have found it possible to create a game with 256 networked characters, all skinned, in vast poly-rich environments, without sacrificing visual fidelity, without making concessions.

We have scratched the surface of this machine's potential and it has allowed us to create what was once considered impossible. Imagine what the future holds.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Following the popular PS2-exclusive series *SOCOM,* Zipper has shifted its focus a touch, applying its shooter savvy to bolster the PS3's online presence with the super-hyped 256-player game, *MAG (Massive Action Game).* In development for the past three-years, *MAG* delves into a shadow war storyline, explores team-based combat through upgradeable ranks, and will expand the PS3's online capabilities with twists on common online games, mission-based online games, and huge environments. Needless to say, *MAG* is a huge release for Sony. Expect it to ship this winter.

HARMONIX MUSIC SYSTEMS

As described by Eric Malafeew, Director of Engineering

CULTURE

Regular company events: Weekly company-wide Friday lunch, annual bowling outing/competition.

In the fridge: A ridiculous assortment of sodas, coffees, juices and more. Also, leftovers from the previous night's crunch dinner.

Most played game in the office: After hours *Rock Band* (currently *The Beatles: Rock Band).*

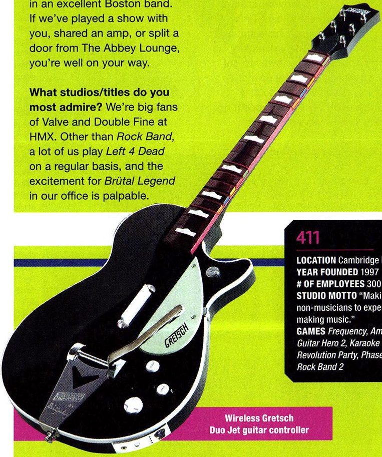
Unique traditions: We have a strong tradition of rock-tastic wrap and holiday parties.

Strangest/coolest item in the office: Full-sized *Stun Runner* arcade machine

Best way to get a job at your studio: Quickest way to work at Harmonix is to balance a great resume with a position in an excellent Boston band. If we've played a show with you, shared an amp, or split a door from The Abbey Lounge, you're well on your way.

What studios/titles do you most admire? We're big fans of Valve and Double Fine at HMX. Other than *Rock Band,* a lot of us play *Left 4 Dead* on a regular basis, and the excitement for *Brütal Legend* in our office is palpable.

THE BEATLES ROCKBAND



Wireless Gretsch Duo Jet guitar controller

411

LOCATION Cambridge MA
YEAR FOUNDED 1997
# OF EMPLOYEES 300
STUDIO MOTTO "Making it possible for non-musicians to experience the joy of making music."
GAMES *Frequency, Amplitude, Guitar Hero, Guitar Hero 2, Karaoke Revolution, Karaoke Revolution Party, Phase, Rock Band,* and *Rock Band 2*

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

Rock Band took advantage of the PS3's next-gen graphics and memory, separate SPUs for audio processing, and custom controller support. *Rock Band* also benefited greatly from the PS3's built-in hard drive, Blu-ray disc capability, and A/V performance. The *Rock Band* Music Store went on to fully utilize the PS3's online commerce, server, and patching capabilities.

By the time of *Rock Band 2,* we were able to work in auto-calibration, cymbal expansion, and drum velocity sensing to our controllers, as well as increase graphics fidelity through the use of GCM Replay, add voice chat, and handle cross-title song exporting and DLC. We were also an early promoter of PS3 Trophies and controller standards. Continued improvements to the PS3 SDK and tools made these developments possible and Sony support has been top-notch.

For *The Beatles* and beyond, we look forward to breaking new ground with controllers and online features possible on the PS3, and to developing even tighter graphics by using Replay's question system and by leveraging the PS3's memory architecture. Finally, we've only scratched the potential of the SPUs, which could provide advanced audio processing and more detailed animation and physics. The PS3, like the PS2 and original PlayStation, is a solid machine with more to offer the more you dig.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Harmonix's music-oriented approach has brought the world ground-breaking musical games. Starting with the unique techno titles *Frequency* and *Amplitude,* the Boston, MA-based studio skyrocketed to fame with the *Guitar Hero* series, and this fall is prepping the Holy Grail of pop accessibility, *The Beatles: Rock Band.* But that's not all: Along with *The Beatles: Rock Band,* Harmonix is whipping up regular *Rock Band* DLC and Track Packs, *Rock Band: Unplugged* (PSP) and *Lego: Rock Band.*

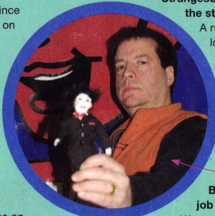
ZOMBIE STUDIOS

As described by John Williamson, President

CULTURE

Regular company events: Every two months we have a LAN party at the office. Every milestone we ship, we try and hit a local pub, if we can still walk. With all the military titles we have done, we have been able to go out and blow up and shoot a lot of sh*t. And I mean a lot. Wisely, we always do that at the start of the dev cycle and not the end, when tempers are a little raw.

In the fridge: Since we are working on *SAW,* we have a severed… just kidding. Same stuff everyone has, a mix of leftovers from home and hot pockets. I have lots and lots of salsa in there which I use on everything but doughnuts. Being from Texas it is required.



Employee reward programs First prize is a new car, second prize is a set of steak knives, and third prize is your fired. The real employee reward program and the one that has helped our retention remain so high—is that people are promoted and given responsibility based on merit and desire. You can come in as a junior artist or programmer and be in charge of your own small casual game or expansion pack in less than two years if you have demonstrated enough talent and leadership.

Most played game in the office: It changes about every 18 months, but right now it is Valve's *Team Fortress.*

Unique traditions: Because we've been around for so many years and shipped so many military shooters, you can link us to just about every military shooter made since 1995 by just one degree of separation, or two at most. The other tradition is that I have shipped every single game I have been assigned here as producer/designer. Every single one in 12 years.

Strangest/coolest item in the studio's office: A rusted, nasty looking saw signed by Leigh Whannel and James Wan from *SAW.* And a full collection of VR HMDs from back in the day.

Best way to get a job at your studio: We use Unreal Tech. So if you don't have shipped games to your credit yet, making an *Unreal* mod is the best way to get our attention. There are so many studios using that tech set, I'd recommend it is time well spent no matter where you apply.

Studios/titles you most admire? The ones with enough money to ship "when it's done", but are smart enough to get it done. There are after all only two types of games: Perfect Games, and Games That Ship.

411

LOCATION Seattle WA
YEAR FOUNDED 1994
# OF EMPLOYEES 55
STUDIO MOTTO "Frame rate is King."
GAMES Best known for the budget shooters series, *Spec Ops: Rangers Lead the Way, Spec Ops: Ranger Team Bravo, and Spec Ops II: Green Berets,* though seasoned gamers might remember *ZPC, Zork Nemesis,* and *Ballistic: Ecks vs. Sever.*

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

The most important thing for me is that we need competition, as both developers and as consumers. We both need PS3 and 360 (and at least two of whatever comes next). This helps keep the price down and tech set evolving. A monopoly would be bad for the "winner."

Regarding the PS3, the two best things we did were, 1) Require that the game run on the PS3 from the second month of development. 2) Hire a great PS3 lead programmer.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT THE PS3 OVER THE COURSE OF DEVELOPING FOR IT?

It isn't much different than any other console or embedded systems development, however its novel architecture makes you approach problems from a different perspective. PlayStation 3 development rewards you for breaking up a problem into its most elegant implementation—ideally, a stream of data processed by a simple code fragment. The difficulty only comes in when you must synchronize all these mostly discreet processes and share resources. This approach should sound familiar as it's much like when the industry moved to shaders for graphics processing over software-based techniques. You have to be willing to rethink the most basic algorithms and design to this strength.

WHAT STANDS OUT THE MOST ABOUT ITS ABILITIES?

The processing power without question. We can defer tasks to the SPUs for everything from AI to offloading graphics tasks. The speed at which you can process streams of data and code allows us to offload character animation, simulate dozens of dynamic lights, or mix hundreds of sound voices on a single SPU task. It's exciting to think of the next big thing to throw on there. However, the data and the code both have to be carefully constructed and coordinated to work. That said, the firmware and SDK features are always expanding the limits of what we as developers can do, and having a hard-drive in every console gives developers the ability to allow larger user-created content to DLC expansions.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

While it might seem like Zombie has been out of the limelight for four or five years now, it appears the studio is on a roll with five major projects in the works: *SAW,* the survival horror game due this Halloween; *Blacklight,* a military action game with comic book and movie tie-ins; *Shrapnel,* an epic solar war trilogy co-created by Mark Long and Nick Sagan, based on a Zombie Studios graphic novel; *Caustic,* a nautically themed third-person survival horror game; and *America's Army 3.0.*

LEVEL-5 INC.

As described by Akihiro Hino, President

CULTURE

Regular company events:
Employee's regular general meetings (presentation of current projects held every three months).

Puzzle training camp based on the *Professor Layton* series. (Puzzle creators and company's game developers gather to create new riddles and puzzles.)

In the fridge:
In addition to snacks we have various pet bottles and desserts. This isn't inside the fridge, but we also have a "zashiki-warashi" in our building. ("Zashiki-warashi" is a child-like spirit from Japanese folklore, which is said to bring good fortune to those who see the spirit.)

Employee reward programs:
We provide an MVP award at our company's general meeting.

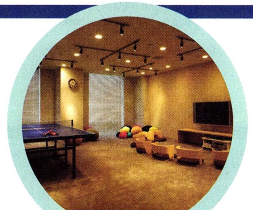
Most played game in the office:
During lunch, our staff enjoys playing various games where they can play against each other.

Unique traditions:
LEVEL-5 VISION: This is our annual presentation of our newest titles. Last year was our 10th anniversary since the birth of our company, and we held a party and presented our newest titles *"Ninokuni"* (tentative title), *"The Little Battlers"* (tentative title), and *"Ushiro"* (tentative title).

Development Completion Announcement: For the *Professor Layton* series we always have famous talents be the voices in the game. And for our Development Completion Announcements, the stars for the game make an appearance as a guest to partake in talk shows and other events.

Strangest/coolest item in the studio's office:
» Arena Room: This is our theater room where we have a huge projection screen and movie theater-like seats.
» Recreation Room: We have a ping-pong table and various game consoles in this room where the staff can enjoy games and set their mind off from work for a change.

Studios you most admire?
Studio Ghibli: Just like how many people rush to the movie theater because it is a "Studio Ghibli film," we hope to establish our Level-5 brand in the same way.

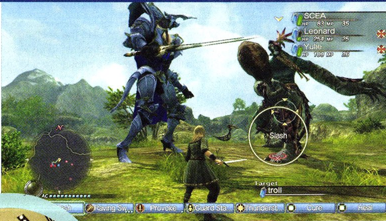


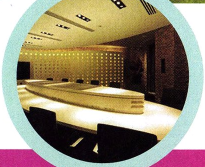
THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

As a developer, we are always aiming to accomplish two things: "To always face new challenges" and "to surprise people." By developing for the PS3, we have expanded how we present our games, and were able to really reach out for what we aimed for.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Level-5 had found itself in a rare and admirable position as both publisher and developer. After establishing itself with the *Dark Cloud* series on PS2, and thereby developing a close relationship with Sony, the small studio has vaulted itself into a multi-console developer and publisher with multiple iterations of the *Professor Layton* series on Nintendo DS. The studio is currently working on an unprecedented 10 titles including the PS3 exclusive *White Knight Chronicles, Dragon Quest IX: Hoshizora no Mamoribito, Professor Layton* series, *Inazuma Eleven 2* (tentative title), *Ninokuni* (tentative title), *Paul Sloane & Des MacHale's Mysterious Story* (tentative title), *Professor Tago and Brain Training 1* (tentative title), *The Little Battlers* (tentative title), *Ushiro* (tentative title), *ROID* (game portal site).



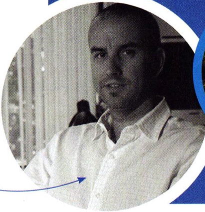


411

LOCATION Fukuoka, Japan
YEAR FOUNDED 1998
# OF EMPLOYEES 205
STUDIO MOTTO "Aiming to become the world's number one entertainment brand."
GAMES *Dark Cloud, Dark Chronicle (Dark Cloud 2), Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King, Rogue Galaxy, Jeanne d'Arc, Ushiro, Cardboard War Machine, Professor Layton* series

EA TIBURON

As described by **Philip Holt, VP, Studio General Manager**



CULTURE

Regular company events:

- Twice-annual golf tournament
- Spring/Summer Family Picnic
- Annual Holiday Party and Award Show ("The Sharkies")
- Movie Nights (rent a theater for opening night of a big film)
- Date Night (free babysitting service a couple of times a year)
- Halloween Party with trick or treating for kids of studio employees
- Christmas party (with pictures with Santa for studio employee's families)
- Launch events, and so on.
- Annual 96 team, multi-tiered Fantasy Football leagues.
- Tons of sports teams: basketball, soccer, hockey, softball, bowling

In the fridge:

Lots of milk, because we supply free milk and cereal in the studio. We've used 350 gallons of fat-free milk, 372 gallons of 2-percent milk, and 356 gallons of soy milk in the last three months (also used 434 quarts of Half & Half). This is all housed in 12 full-sized kitchens, including 11 small, three full-sized, and three industrial refrigerators.

Employee reward programs:

SPOT STOCK: A grant of restricted stock is made for outstanding contributions from employees above and beyond the call of duty.

ANNUAL AWARDS ("The Sharkies"): Nominated and voted on by employees in the studio, we give out a dozen or so awards for things like Outstanding Achievement in Design, Engineering, or Art, Rookie of the Year, Best Prank, and so on.

GAME PLAQUES AND T-SHIRTS: for shipping products, etc.

ACCESS TO SPORTING EVENTS: Super Bowl tickets, NASCAR Hot Passes, PGA Tour cards, BCS Championship tickets, etc.

Most played game in the office:

World of Warcraft was a big mainstay for awhile. Lots of people are playing *Fallout 3.* Our sports guys play a lot of *FIFA, NHL,* and *MLB: The Show.*

Unique traditions:

Golden Spatula Tournament: NCAA Football tournament held every year. The winner takes the Golden Spatula trophy (literally a spatula attached to a dual shock controller and spray painted gold) for the year. Within the last several years, other EA studios have challenged us for the coveted trophy. Last year's final saw one of our Tiburon employees take on someone from EARS, supported by over 100 cheering colleagues, live play-by-play and color commentary, and vid-con'd into the hapless EARS employee's cube.

Pranking:

There is a strong culture of pranking in the studio. Last year, someone removed his manager's door and re-drywalled the opening. Someone put a golf cart in the GM's office. There are enough pranks in the studio that we have an annual award for the best prank.

Strangest/coolest item in the studio's office:

The *Madden* team has a "build pony" (named Butterscotch), a creepy animatronic pony that stays with the last person that broke the build. We have tons of sports memorabilia from Tiger, John Madden, and countless other athletes.

Best way to get a job at your studio:

Many people still get their start in QA. The Executive Producer, Sr. Producer, and Lead Designer on *Madden NFL* all got their start in QA. We also find people at *Madden NFL* and *NCAA Football* tournaments. The Creative Director on *NCAA Football* won a national college tournament for the game, while he was at Nebraska. We hired him as a tester and he worked his way up.

We've found people through our community. Will Kinsler, who leads our Tiburon community efforts, founded Maddenmania.com before we recruited him. Artists need a great reel/demo/YouTube piece. Engineers need solid fundamentals (typically acquired through University) and a great demo, shareware game, iPhone game, etc. Producers need a commanding knowledge of games, sports, and design. Ultimately, we look for people who are smart and passionate.

What studios/titles do you most admire?

Blizzard, Infinity Ward, Valve, BioWare, Nintendo, Harmonix, EA Canada, SCEA San Diego *(MLB: The Show)*

411

LOCATION Orlando, Florida
YEAR FOUNDED 1994
# OF EMPLOYEES Approximately 650
STUDIO MOTTO "Play to win."
GAMES *NFL Head Coach, Madden NFL, NCAA Football, NASCAR, Tiger Woods PGA Tour, NFL Street, Superman Returns, Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure*

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

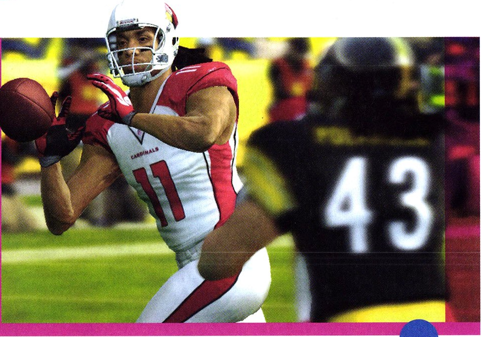
Our games were not written to scale well on an asymmetrical (PPU/SPU) parallel architecture. In many ways this brought us back to the drawing board, and ultimately made our games better. The SPU and Blu-ray are the two abilities that stand out. With a default Blu-ray drive, many developers won't worry about limiting the quantity or quality of content in games. This is the perfect medium to deliver the next generation of gaming.

With a default hard drive in all PS3 models, developers are guaranteed storage that they can take advantage of for caching, save files, etc. While the size of the hard drive may vary, the fact that there is a hard drive present in all consoles allows developers to focus on optimizing the user experience for features that can take advantage of console storage space.

We should enter the golden age of the PS3 soon. Once most developers have mastered the capabilities of the hardware, they should focus less on technical issues, and more about developing great games.

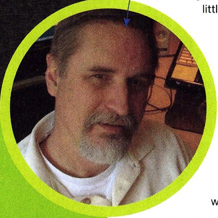
CURRENT PROJECTS:

Since 1994, Tiburon has been THE *Madden* development studio. While football offshoots such as *NFL Head Coach* and the *NASCAR* series have helped expand the studio's endeavors beyond its bread-and-butter, Tiburon's consistent, annual work on *Madden, NCAA Football,* and the *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* have put—and kept—it on the map. Accordingly, we'll see *Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 10, NCAA Football 10,* and *Madden NFL 10* later this year.



AIRTIGHT GAMES

As described by Jim Deal, President



CULTURE

Regular company events:
We have a softball team that actually won more than one game last year, and a heated "Whirlyball" rivalry between our animation lead and the rest of the studio. Whirlyball is a game played on bumper cars with a ball and a scoop. It's a little bit of a mix between lacrosse and basketball.

In the fridge:
There's some stuff in our fridge that no human being should have to look at. I stay away from the fridge as much as possible.

Employee reward programs:
We are a small studio where employees have a say in the creative day to day. We feel this kind of participation is the best motivation. It keeps people involved in what they are doing. In the end, being able to say you were an integral part in a great game is what we strive for.

Most played game in the office:
Left 4 Dead is a game played a lot recently. At times, there have been a lot people playing online after work. I remember lots of shrieking and screaming going on. Some of it was from the zombies on screen, too.

Strangest/coolest item in the studio's office:
World War II airplane parts are scattered about. These are mostly painted green and not really recognizable as airplane parts. They contrast nicely in a gritty realistic way with the usual action figures and lightsabers found around the studio.

Best way to get a job at your studio:
Be good at what you do. We look for talent first and experience second. That being said it is very hard for someone young and inexperienced to get a job. One thing I always suggest to people who ask is to create a mod level. We have people working here who are very successful and started out in the mod community.

What studios/titles do you most admire?
I admire the risks taken by the team that did *Mirror's Edge* recently. I think it's great to see new concepts that don't fit into pre-ordained molds. Creativity and risk taking like that is refreshing and necessary for the industry. ■

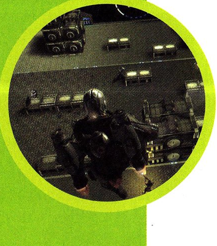
THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

At Airtight, we have a lot of experience with multi-core processing and physics. The seven cores on the PS3 have been instrumental in getting some of the innovative features for *Dark Void* to work. One of those features is vertical combat on surfaces that are moving. This became a technical and performance challenge for us. Ragdoll physics combined with the movement of the environment posed a serious technical hurdle—one that was helped along by multiple processing cores to manage with the calculation load on PS3.

The future is unlimited in my mind. I expect the possibilities of what we can achieve on the next generation platform to be limited only by time and money. More processing power, better video fidelity. Add on top of that advanced physics and dynamic interactions, and the experience will be truly new and amazing.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

"Airtight Games is crunching right now to finish up *Dark Void* with Capcom," President Jim Deal told PTOM, referring to *Dark Void's* August release date. "We're also working on another unannounced title with an unannounced publisher." Wouldn't it be fun if this "unannounced" title was in fact *Crimson Skies 2?* Perhaps equally fascinating is the fact that *Capcom* is publishing *Dark Void*. That, in itself, is a statement. Although Capcom had a Western in-house studio (Maximo, Maximo 2), *Dark Void* represents a significant break in the Japanese publisher's previous unwillingness to work with third-party studios, and paves the way for a broader more worldwide perspective.



411

LOCATION Redmond WA
YEAR FOUNDED 2004
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES 61
STUDIO MOTTO "Our Goal is to make AAA, 90+ ranked games."
GAMES Its principle directors hail from Microsoft Game Studios, Midway, and FASA, which was responsible for the award-winning *Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge.*

Pirates knew how to have fun on a budget. Paid once a year (maybe). And no dental coverage. But you know what? Pirates had a blast. They had hard times, but they still had fun. Had they been able to drive, pirates certainly would have picked the all new 2010 MAZDA*3*. Why? Because the MAZDA*3* offers trick stuff like available Nav System and Dual Outlet Exhaust without costing a ton of booty. Plus, it's far more fuel efficient than a gigantic pirate ship. And with quick-response steering, way more fun to drive. So check out a MAZDA*3* and get what you need for some Yo Ho Ho fun without spending a king's ransom. All new. All that. MAZDA*3*.

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Reviews

Scores | Analysis | Buying Advice

RATINGS

★★★★★ **LEGENDARY**
A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

★★★★½ **SUPERB**
Not quite a timeless classic, but one of the finest of its breed.

★★★★ **GREAT!**
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

★★★½ **SOLID**
A strong game. We noticed some flaws, but there's more to like than loathe.

★★★ **ENJOYABLE**
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

★★½ **MEDIOCRE**
An equal blend of sweet and sour. Discerning gamers can find better.

★★ **SCARRED**
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

★½ **FRUSTRATING**
"Argh!" will be the self-created soundtrack of this game. No thank you.

★ **PAINFUL**
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

½ **BROKEN**
Hey, it comes in a free plastic box! Wee!

Win junk from Rob's desk! We'll select one winner from emails that correctly identify the three photos from our Rating scale and explain how they're related. Send your answers with the subject line "August Ratings" to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com.

Hot 5 List Top Picks from Recent Issues

1) **Fight Night Round 4** p. 64	★★★★★
2) **Wolverine** | PS3 | July 09	★★★★
3) **Patapon 2** | PSP | June 09	★★★★
4) **MLB 09: The Show** | PS3 | May 09	★★★★½
5) **Sonic Collection** | PS3 | Apr 09	★★★★

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

This month, *Ghostbusters* has the PTOM crew pondering whose ghost they'd want to meet.

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"Definitely Winston Churchill," because Rob imagines he'd be the most pissed off ghost in eternity—upset about being a ghost and unable to indulge in some of his preferred entertainments. And he'd have stories, great stories about offending the sensibilities of London's social elite and hanging with Roosevelt and Stalin to divvy up the planet. Can ghosts drink and smoke cigars?

NOW PLAYING: *Fight Night Round 4, FIFA 09, Puzzle Quest Galactrix, Tiger Woods 10*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Teresa delightedly squeals, "Johnny Depp's ghost, for sure." Oh wait, he's not dead. She just really wants to meet him. As for meeting someone who's actually dead? Teresa doesn't spend her leisure time dreaming of chatting up historical figures (because she still has a life), so she selects her great, great, great, grandmother as her choice, just because. Such a sweet girl!

NOW PLAYING: *Sacred 2, Crimson Gem Saga, Resident Evil 5, Loco Roco 2*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

"Bob Paisley." Um, who? "He was manager of the Liverpool Football Club during the '70s and early '80s. In nine years as manager, he lead Liverpool to six League titles, three European Cups, one UEFA Cup, three League Cups, five Community Shields, and a UEFA Super Cup. Paisley is the only manager to win three European Cups. I'd consider it an honor to buy his ghost a pint." Dead soccer guy—got it.

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA Soccer 09*

CARLOS RUIZ
INTERN

The more we learn about Carlos, the more concerned we become. But the dead guy he'd most like to meet is Garry Hoy who's famous(?) for plunging to his death while trying to prove that the window glass of his high-rise office building was unbreakable. It wasn't. Check out http://www.cracked.com/article_16760_6-people-who-died-in-order-prove-retarded-point.html for all the details.

NOW PLAYING: *Street Fighter IV, Rag Doll Kung Fu, Bionic Commando*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

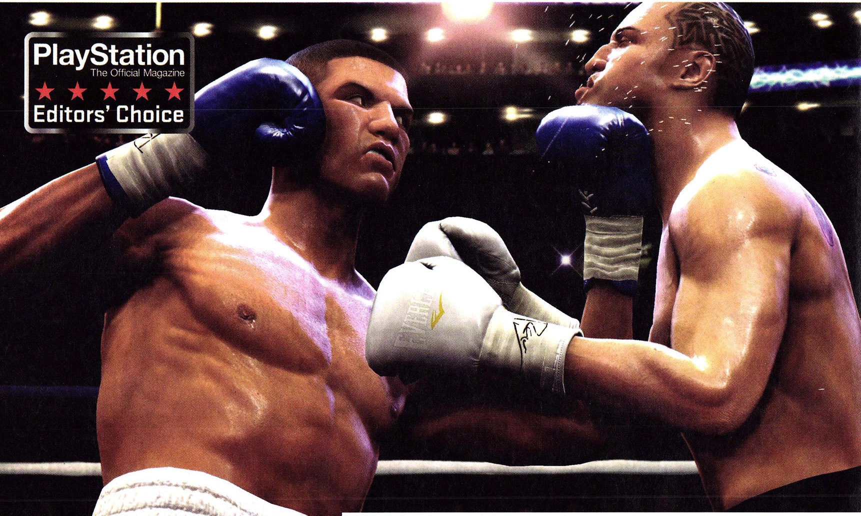
Roger could list all manner of historical and Hollywood ghost hotties he'd like to meet, but that doesn't change the fact that 1) he's still married, and 2) he'd strike out with 'em anyway. So he'll go with Stevie Ray Vaughn, whom he'd beg to possess his body (oh, ick!) so that he could experience—just once—what it feels like to be a great guitar player.

NOW PLAYING: *Ghostbusters, Terminator Salvation, SingStar Queen, LEGO Batman*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

When selecting a supernatural being to encounter in person, it's important to remember that most ghosts will attempt to fight/haunt you. That's why Scott picked Mark Twain. Because seriously, how could Mark Twain ever be scary? He'd probably just smoke a pipe and wryly satirize American culture while dressed like a Southern gentleman. He might even throw in a few quips about being dead. Best ghost ever!

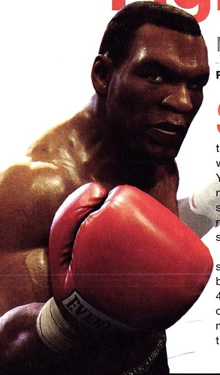
NOW PLAYING: *Red Faction: Guerrilla, BlazBlue, The King of Fighters XII*



Bell-ringing? Land a powerful uppercut and you're sure to cause your opponent to wobble. The health bar is likely to flash red, so use the Triangle button to get in a clinch and wait for your head to clear.

PS3 | R

Fight Night Round 4



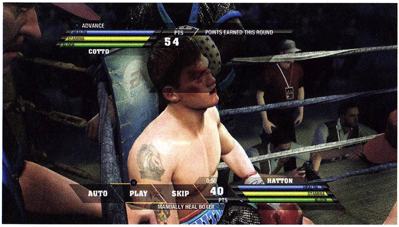
Not just a contender—the Greatest Of All Time

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Vancouver

Sore, swollen, and a little bruised. The bloody edges of the cut won't close because the pounding is incessant; it spreads wider, splits longer with each bout. Yes, my thumbs are an absolute mess. Chopped liver. Swathed in stained band-aids. Desperately needing numbing ice packs and soothing ointment.

I'm really not kidding. But if this sounds like a problem, it's anything but. EA Sports' Fight Night Round 4 is one of those rare hard-to-put-down gaming experiences, however much damage its demanding control scheme may impart on your fragile controller hands. Most of us will never experience the depths of physical degradation felt at the end of a 10-round light heavyweight bout against a powerhouse like Roy Jones Jr. (in his prime). But if you extrapolate out to the rest of your body the strain felt in your hands and volume of sweat on your brow from sitting on your backside for 10 three-minute rounds of beatdown, then Fight Night Round 4 is an impressively adept virtual recreation of life in the ring.

I mean, it hurts. It hurts when you lose, naturally, but you'll know you've been in a fight even if you win. And that's part of the beauty, particularly as you become embroiled in the deep, compelling Legacy Mode. The goal is simple: G.O.A.T. (Greatest Of All Time, as Muhammad Ali is known). The path to get there? Long, arduous, and likely mixed with its share of lows to go with the terrific highs of seeing an opponent crumple to the canvas after you land a devastating right hook. For FNR4, this new Legacy mode is the crux of the single-player experience. Once you create a fighter (including snapping your own mug, should you wish, into the GameFace feature), set a weight



The between-round mini-game lets you specify if you want to regenerate health, stamina, or damage. You earn points during the round based on your percentage of punches landed and stunning or knocking down your opponent.

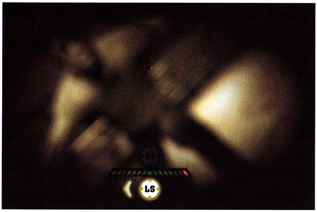
class, and apply details like a nickname, entry style, boxing style, and color choices for your shorts, shoes, robe, and even mouth guard, you take part in an amateur tournament that establishes your initial skill set and ranking. And so light heavyweight Rob "The Blade" Smith got in the ring to start his career. And with everything from cancels and combos to dashes and throws, the combat still holds an incredible amount of depth and complexity… and it's as fun as ever.

Stick it to 'em

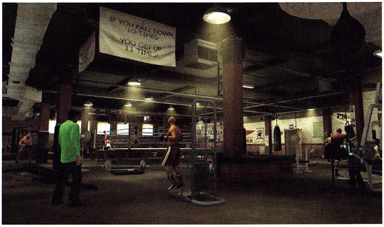
FNR4 has a unique, surprisingly intuitive control scheme that's tweaked from the one in FNR3, but will still feel familiar. Essentially, the Right-analog stick controls every punch you throw, and the Left stick shapes every move and the direction of your blows. It is simple yet will take many, many bouts to master. Arm reach, timing, your momentum, his momentum, stamina levels, blocking ability, chin stats, even heart all factor into a seemingly simple outcome of whether a left upper-cut makes contact—and for how much effect—with your opponent's head or torso.

Like Olympic three-round boxers, you could swing wildly, holding L2 to apply the "Haymaker" modifier to every hit, hoping you land lucky. But that's not boxing, and that's not Fight Night Round 4.

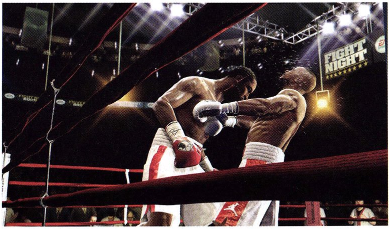
Standing back, circling, allowing your yellow stamina bar to recharge after a barrage of blows is just as important as throwing hundreds of punches. But judging the timing and executing counter-punches is the real way to stun your opponent into a stupor. If you dodge a big punch (by using L1 to sway your torso out of the way) you may "feel" the screen slow down for a fraction of a second (with a very slight zoom in of the camera), an indication that a counter punch opportunity is open. Blink and you'll miss it, but it's a strikingly intuitive method of providing perceptive feedback to inform your next punch without going into quick-time event button presses or something similar. Land that counter and you're rewarded with a jarring spit, snot, and blood shower as your opponent's head snaps to the side or torso buckles under the blunt force trauma. Of course, you can also feel it coming too, so



The ability to get up from a knockdown is a very tricky, often frustrating mini-game in itself. You have to move the Left stick until the meter slows into the middle green section, then push up on the Right stick.



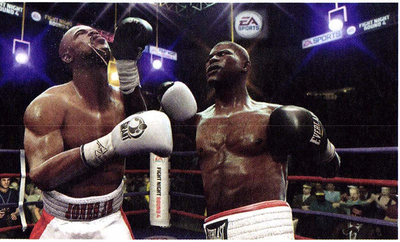
Schedule bouts at least two months apart to get in as many training sessions as possible. But sim them if you find you're losing points, rather than gaining them.



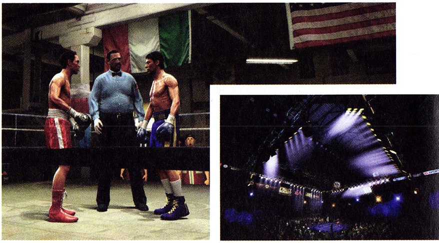
Butt what? Not that Lennox Lewis would ever do that, but you do have a "dirty fighting" button, and can even set how much of your fight you want to be "dirty" while simming a bout, which in this case means using your head…

Hatton's Rematch

I had to get revenge, to play as England's favorite northern son, Ricky Hatton, against the phenomenal Filipino, Manny Pacquiao. I was leading on all three judges' cards, winning the first seven rounds, but lost the eighth, largely because Rob Smith's hands were cramping like it seemed Hatton's arms and legs were. Round nine, I moved in, hands low, blocking against a body shot, I weaved left as Pacquiao's fist smashed right. And down I went. 21 minutes of sterling commitment and concentration and one fraction of a second for it all to go dark. That's boxing, that's Fight Night.

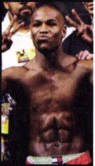


A three minute round can be draining, so use the full minute between rounds to rest yourself and apply your earned points to health or stamina (and check out the ring girls if you must!



Though your goal is to fight on boxing's biggest stages (like the MGM, inset) you'll start in the dusty gyms. But listen to your corner men (and your opponent's) for dynamic tips on what you should do and what he's going to try.

In Absentia



While the roster of boxers is extensive, includes legends of the sport, journeymen, and up-and-comers, it does have a few notable omissions from any fans' list of all-time greats. Planned downloadable content will no doubt plug some of the gaps, but you can circumvent some of that by using the extensive character creator. Say, for example, you wanted to add in Round 3's cover star, Oscar de la Hoya. What about comeback man, Floyd Mayweather? This is how: we went through all the available stats to which you apply points in the creation tool, and this is what we came up with to put these stars of the ring in your FNR4. Take your time to sculpt the face, then apply these styles and numbers and see how they feel. Of course, tweak to your heart's content (but be sure to let me know your own stat sets).

	Oscar de la Hoya	Floyd Mayweather
Boxer Style	Steady	Speed
Block Style	Classic	Philly
Punch Style	Balanced	Speed
Signature Punch	Bolo Left Hook	Chin Fake Right Straight
Best Punch	Left Hook	Right Straight
Left Power	92	85
Right Power	87	88
Hand Speed	89	99
Foot Speed	87	96
Head Toughness	92	89
Body Toughness	84	89
Chin	93	89
Stamina	85	92
Accuracy	88	94
Head Movement	88	96
Block Strength	94	90
Cuts/Swelling	88/84	90/86
Heart	84	84

PS3 | R

make sure to weave and hope they miss the opening.

Crucially, these controls are very responsive, but also require speed and precision. You learn that in the six training sessions that can improve (and also reduce) your stats. Five of the six are essentially quick-time events, but they're hard. If you choose to auto-train you reduce by 50-percent the potential earning capacity for each mode's stat development, but that's still about 40-percent more than I was earning trying to figure them out for myself. Hitting the heavy sack or maize ball sounds simple enough, but it requires a level of Right-stick flicking precision that can easily result in being tagged a bum. That can be highly frustrating as you look good in the ring and can eke out wins on the judges' scorecards, but don't feel like you're making real progress as your stats remain flat. Ultimately, that plays into the length of your career. Setting bouts a few months apart you can suddenly find yourself a 28-year old journeyman with a middling record and no future. Time to hang up the gloves and start over again.

No pain, no glory

No doubt, achieving those championship belts and glory is hard. But really, it's hard. You need absolute precise command of that Right-analog stick. You also need to not make a mistake, get caught by that knockdown shot when you're leading on points. But should you find yourself mired in a mid-career grind, you can always take a break and see how it feels to fit in the gloves of Ali, Tyson, or any of some 50-plus real-world pugilists. For fun, you can put fighters within two weight classes in the same ring (handy for achieving a couple of the Trophies that require you to defeat a specific guy on one of the four difficulty levels—put in a light heavyweight against a welterweight and it gets much easier!) But the real kicker is the online world championship bouts. Though we weren't able to see the full online experience, the time we spent mano-a-mano was as compelling as you might imagine. Despite the fundamental control difficulty, it's still intuitive enough to let more casual players swing their fists and unload some latent aggression.

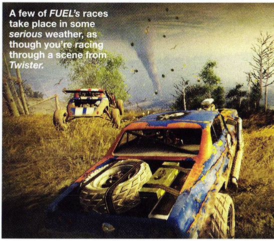
Like many games earning classic status, FNR4 generates repeated standout, jaw-dropping moments, and none of them pre-scripted. You've seen the visuals and they're simply spectacular. Then, on a knockdown the slow-mo effect causes howls of pain (or delight) as you can flip between camera angles to capture the perfect moment of lights-out contact. To prove your greatness you can pause at any point and save out highlights from the previous 20 seconds, then edit them with your own camera angles and upload to EA servers to show off to friends and enemies.

I can pretty much guarantee you'll have moments you want to talk up, share, and relive—even the ones that result in your silk shorts hitting the canvas. It's that much fun, that challenging, and ultimately that rewarding. Just remember you may have to hit the thumb gym yourself to get prepared to feel the burn.

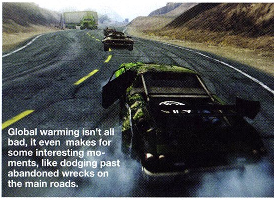
Rob Smith

★★★★★

You can create your own races, setting up to 75 miles of checkpoints on any road or trail in the game. You can even race them online.



A few of *FUEL's* races take place in some *serious* weather, as though you're racing through a scene from *Twister.*



Global warming isn't all bad, it even makes for some interesting moments, like dodging past abandoned wrecks on the main roads.

FUEL

Blaze your own trail

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: Asobo Studio

One of the great joys of this job is firing up a game with absolutely no expectations or preconceptions, and discovering that it well and truly rocks. Such is the case with *FUEL,* a post environmental apocalypse, open-world racing game that was totally off my radar until I started playing...and discovered that it has some of the most entertaining off-road racing I've ever experienced.

Most games of the genre advertise "off-road," but what they really mean is "dirt track," and they actually penalize off-track excursions pretty ferociously. (I'm looking at you, *ATV Offroad Fury.) FUEL,* on the other hand, includes many events that feature true off-road racing: You get a set of widely-spaced checkpoints—or in some cases simply an endpoint—and your job is to reach them by any means necessary, balancing the risks of running into trees, stumps, or hidden ravines against the potential reward of discovering a sweet shortcut.

Vehicles are varied and detailed and impressively convey a proper sense of heft.

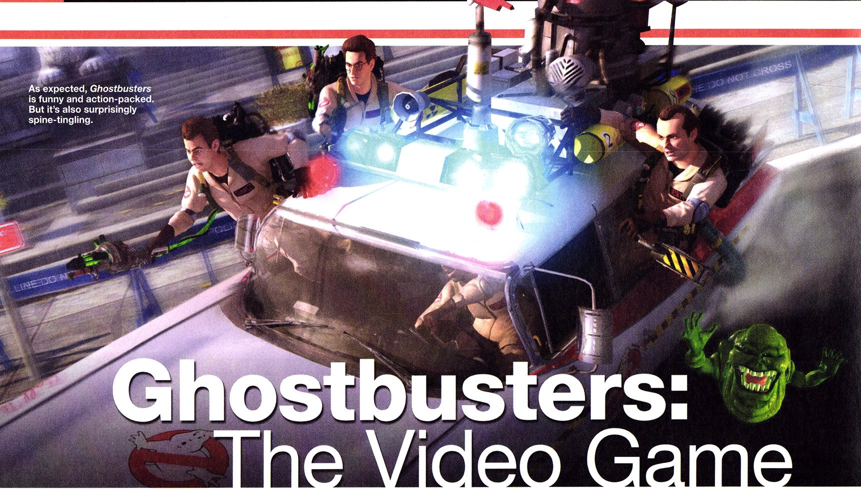
But it's not just the race structure that makes *FUEL* so striking; it's also the ridiculous scale. I mean, *ridiculous.* The game map is somewhere on the order of *70 miles* to a side, making for around 5,000 square miles of roads, tracks, and wilderness. It's almost too big, really: Trying to track down collectible vehicle designs, vista points, and hidden challenges in Free Ride mode can feel like it takes forever. The game does make things a bit more interesting by giving you the option of Online Free Ride, which brings up to 15 players into your in-game region, but you'll still spend a lot of time just wandering. (Online races are available, too, also with up to 16 players.)

The real kicker, though, is that all this open space is almost universally gorgeous. Gone are the smooth, featureless hills we've seen in other games in the genre; *FUEL's* landscapes look and feel more real than they have any right to, from craggy mountains full of throat-clenching drops to appropriately soft-feeling sand dunes. These picturesque environments are highlighted by spectacular weather effects and lighting—racing *through* a tornado is *not* to be missed.

This visual mastery doesn't come totally without a price. Landscape details tend to pop in pretty dramatically, for example, and the game suffers from the occasional stutter. The sound effects seem surprisingly low-fi, as well, and loading screens intrude frequently enough to be noticeable. But when compared to the staggering scope of this game, *FUEL's* flaws seem tiny. Taken as a whole, it's a top-notch addition to the genre.

Joe Rybicki

★★★★½



As expected, *Ghostbusters* is funny and action-packed. But it's also surprisingly spine-tingling.

Ghostbusters: The Video Game

An inter-dimensional cross rip of nostalgic proportions

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Atari DEVELOPER: Terminal Reality

Blockbuster movie classic. Comedy mega-icons. A veritable lexicon for pseudo-scientific techno nerd babble. And 25 years to get it right. If *Ghostbusters* couldn't get the whole movie-licensed game thing to work, then there really is no hope for the much-maligned breed.

The game's storyline, penned by Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis, picks up two years after the second *Ghostbusters* movie. Business has been good thanks to signing a lucrative, exclusive contract with the city where it assumes responsibility for your damages and bills its insurance company (the amount of billable damages actually serves as a scoring mechanism in the game—yes, you're Ghostbustin' *and* stickin' it to an insurance company*...nice.)*

The founding Ghostbusters team (Bill Murray's Venkman, Aykroyd's Stantz, Ramis' Spengler, and Ernie Hudson's Zeddmore) is looking to enlist a new recruit and possibly franchise the operation. Sigourney Weaver passed on the project, so Venkman's love interest, Dana Barrett, has been replaced by Dr. Ilyssa Selwyn, voiced by Alyssa Milano. The only problem is that Selwyn looks like a less attractive Milano, and Milano's voice acting isn't as memorable as her aesthetics. Annie Potts reprises her role as receptionist Janine Melnitz, but Louis Tully is a no show as Rick Moranis is evidently off starring in *Honey, I Shrunk My Career.*

You assume the role of the new recruit in the game, rendered as possibly the most non-descript white guy in recorded history. The newbie is constantly on the frontlines of the paranormal action, but you're essentially the silent partner to the "star" Ghostbusters' banter, and in this role absorb spook-sparring instruction and feedback on your performance. A Create-A-Ghostbuster option would have helped immerse any player more personally into the game, but at least the storyline is engaging enough that you won't mind being the nameless new guy.

The interesting dynamic is how the game's story comes across as a vehicle for Stanz and Spengler (Aykroyd's and Ramis' characters) whereas the films always seemed more centered on Murray's Venkman character. Hudson's Zeddmore does get fleshed out more than in the movies, but the contrived love interest portions of the story merely highlight Murray's diminished creative involvement in the game. The exchanges between Stanz and Spengler certainly capture the spirit and flavor of the movies, but they're more amusing than outright hilarious—more along the lines of the *Ghostbusters II* movie than the inspired original. Still, there's enough here to keep *Ghostbusters* fans engaged and serve as a workable backdrop for a videogame.

Slime time

And work it does—at least in the parts that really count. The core ghost-battling, demon-frying mechanic is the heart of the *Ghostbusters* game and is executed

Team-building exercises

Ghostbusters' multiplayer component stays true to the source material with the focus on co-op and friendly competitive play—a still-familiar, but refreshing take on the standard deathmatch and CTF offerings.

PLAYERS Up to 4

NUMBER OF PLAY MODES 2
- **Instant Action** – single job, singlemap
- **Campaign** – multiple jobs of one type

NUMBER OF MAPS 12

NUMBER OF JOB TYPES 6
- **Survival** – Waves of ghosts attack: survive the longest.
- **Containment** – Find, capture, and destroy the most ghosts within a time limit.
- **Destruction** – Find and destroy evil ghost-spawning relics.
- **Protection** – Protect "PKE Disrupters" from a ghostly onslaught until they're up and running.
- **Thief** – Protect artifacts from thieving ghosts.
- **Slime Dunk** – Anything goes as you compete against your teammates to capture the most ghosts possible.

perfectly. The new-for-the-game Proton Pack configuration now packs four blast modes ranging from the standard Blast Stream to the Shock Blast to the Meson Collider to the familiar Slime Blower, with a primary and secondary fire-type for each. Each attack has different attributes, but you'll describe those traits with familiar terms like the "shotgun" Shock Blast and the "rocket launcher" Boson Darts (a secondary attack). Admittedly, *Ghostbusters'* combat mechanic is standard shooter fare for the most part with the Proton Pack's various modes serving as the equivalent of weapon selections found in other games. But if you want to imbue a game with the color and personality of its licensed property, this is how you do it.

You'll enjoy experimenting with the range of attacks to weaken and neutralize your otherworldly adversaries, but it's the Proton Blast Stream you'll utilize most to grab and direct ghosts into your traps. This is where the game is at its best: You and your Ghostbustin' mates wrestling and wrangling with the entity caught in your beam, slamming it into walls, the ceiling, the floor or against any object that resides in the environment, actually struggling to direct your quarry over the energized whirlpool-like funnel emanating from your Ghost Trap so you can suck it into containment. Anyone who's ever dreamed of strapping on a Proton Pack to face off against paranormal phenomenon will think, "Yeah, this is just how I thought it'd feel."

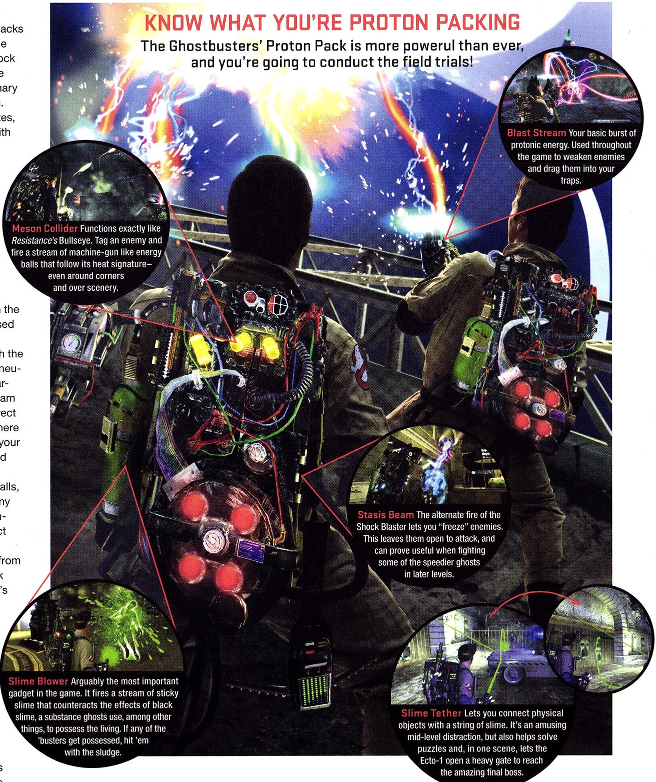
If you don't care for the *Ghostbusters* franchise (heretic!), you may discount the impact and importance of the ghost-wrangling play experience. After all, the game, despite being a solid effort, ultimately falls shy of total satisfaction due to the brevity of the play experience (you'll complete it in under 10 hours and earn just a few videos and a lot of concept art for your troubles). But for *Ghostbusters* fans it's a credible realization of a 25-year-old dream: to don that stylish jumpsuit and strap on a Proton Pack. Call it being possessed by nostalgic charm, but all bets are off when I hear, "Who you gonna call?!"

Roger Burchill

★★★★

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE PROTON PACKING

The Ghostbusters' Proton Pack is more powerul than ever, and you're going to conduct the field trials!



Blast Stream Your basic burst of protonic energy. Used throughout the game to weaken enemies and drag them into your traps.

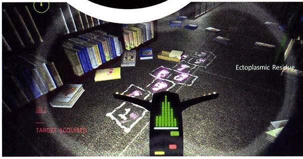
Meson Collider Functions exactly like *Resistance's* Bullseye. Tag an enemy and fire a stream of machine-gun like energy balls that follow its heat signature—even around corners and over scenery.

Stasis Beam The alternate fire of the Shock Blaster lets you "freeze" enemies. This leaves them open to attack, and can prove useful when fighting some of the speedier ghosts in later levels.

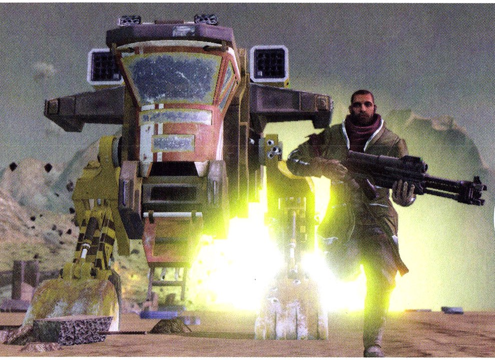
Slime Blower Arguably the most important gadget in the game. It fires a stream of sticky slime that counteracts the effects of black slime, a substance ghosts use, among other things, to possess the living. If any of the 'busters get possessed, hit 'em with the sludge.

Slime Tether Lets you connect physical objects with a string of slime. It's an amusing mid-level distraction, but also helps solve puzzles and, in one scene, lets the Ecto-1 open a heavy gate to reach the amazing final boss.

Scenes like the dimensional rift in the Library level will have you believing you've been transported into the next *GB* movie.



The PKE scanner needs to be referenced frequently to detect and record signs of paranormal activity.



Missions are pretty hairy...until you stumble across a walker. Then, you're nearly an unstoppable killing machine.

Red Faction: Guerrilla

The Red Planet Blues

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Volition, Inc.

PS3 | R

As a building-demolition simulator, *Red Faction: Guerrilla* works beautifully. It's the equivalent of being handed a giant virtual sledgehammer and told to "go nuts!" With a few swings of your mighty hammer, you can rip away huge chunks of a building's support structure and watch it slowly collapse on itself. The environments seem somewhat flimsy and—thanks to the noticeable repetition of basic structural elements—look more like balsa wood movie sets than retrofitted, disaster-proof buildings, but this only slightly diminishes the joy of the otherwise entertaining mayhem.

Unfortunately, *RFG* is not a building-demolition simulator. It's actually a painfully conventional open-world action game, similar in design to Volition's other big franchise, *Saints Row*. This game, however, casts you as the ironically named, impossibly strong Alec Mason, who's been swept up in a Martian resistance movement. Sadly, the game never takes time to craft a reason for you to care about the revolution: the story is brief, the characters are bland, and your enemy—the Earth Defense Force—is so shamelessly one-dimensional that they might as well erect a sign over their base that reads, "We love kicking puppies in the face."

The open-world structure doesn't provide the variation you'd hope it would. Your job is to drive the EDF out of six different sectors—a task you accomplish by completing missions and thereby loosening their tyrannical grip. But instead of a handful of unique, compelling missions, you're provided an endless supply of unimaginative errands. Even the core story missions feel oddly like side quests, and while this doesn't kill *all* the fun, it leaves the overall experience feeling somewhat empty.

The actual combat is respectable thanks to tight controls and a few badass weapons (looking at you, rifle that disintegrates things), but it comes with its own set of annoyances. For example, normal shooter tactics—you know, the run-and-gun style you'd expect from a third-person shooter like this—oftentimes don't work because you're so heavily outnumbered.

Now, overwhelming odds can be fun but only when you're given the means to deal with them. And here, it's quite the opposite: weapons feel pathetically weak (and you can only carry four), ammo is super limited, you have no special tools or abilities, NPC allies are basically fodder, and you rarely get a chance to use the game's more powerful vehicles, like the super-awesome walkers (read: mechs). Naturally, this results in much death and frustration.

Red Faction: Guerrilla is a decent game, but it feels like the developers invested too heavily in the physic-based destruction and neglected to create a well-rounded experience that could contend with the likes of its own *Saints Row*. Scott Butterworth

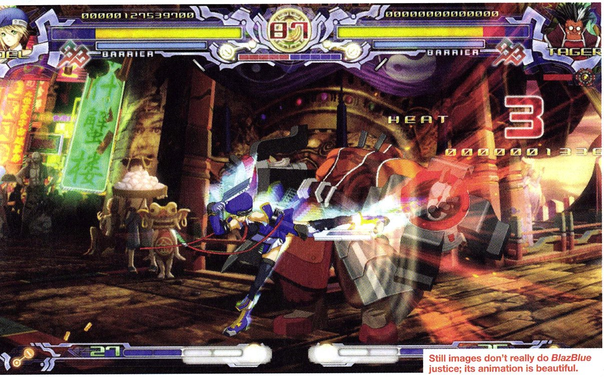
★★★½

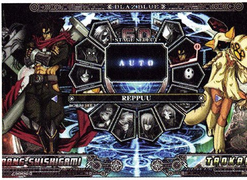
Try not to feel too bad when you blow up an ally. They're pretty stupid.

Survival tip: 'jack an EDF vehicle and turn the mounted gun against them. Always a good plan.

It's hammer time!

The multiplayer portion of *Red Faction: Guerrilla* offers your standard array of match types but manages to put an interesting spin on the typical third-person deathmatch-style gameplay by introducing "backpacks," which are essentially instant power-ups you can collect while in a match: jet packs, x-ray vision, invisibility, all manner of cool abilities that really help to turn the typical run-and-gun gameplay into something more. We found the sledgehammer to be grossly overpowered, but aside from that, *RFG's* multiplayer will be an enjoyable bonus for those who pick up the game.





Still images don't really do *BlazBlue* justice; its animation is beautiful.

BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger

Still love 2D fighting? Then you need this

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Aksys Games **DEVELOPER:** Arc System Works

Now that 2D fighters are officially a "niche" genre, a game like *BlazBlue* will appeal to exactly two kinds of people: super-technical players willing to study arcane concepts like "guard crush" and "barrier throw escape," and old-school fighting fans who just like to bust out *Shoryukens* and can maybe execute a few good combos.

The good news is that *BlazBlue* has plenty to offer both. Created by the minds behind *Guilty Gear,* it delivers plenty of fast, over-the-top action complete with gigantic super attacks, intimidating levels of optional depth, and some of the prettiest 2D visuals on the PS3.

Each of *BlazBlue's* 12 fighters is radically different, and each is specifically tailored to a certain play style. The bizarre Arakune (who resembles a dish rag in a hockey mask) is perfect for buttonmashers, while pistol-packing Noel excels at busting out endless juggle combos. Ragna and Jin are the Sol/Ky stand-ins (or Ryu/Ken, for non-*Guilty Gear* fans), cat-girl Taokaka can zip unpredictably around the screen, and gothic-Lolita Rachel's play style revolves around setting traps. Some characters even have unique, game-changing items, like special onscreen gauges, an independent six-foot marionette, or a staff that can be used as a platform to launch jumping attacks.

Even once you've mastered a few fighters, scratching *BlazBlue's* surface reveals a small galaxy of counters, escapes, and hidden specials for those who want to take the time to delve in and learn them. You don't need them to hold your own in multiplayer, but they definitely give you an edge.

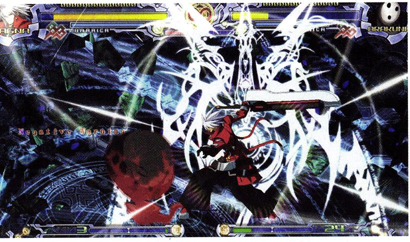
If *Street Fighter IV's* transition to 3D left you cold (or even if it didn't), *BlazBlue* is a treat. The easy-to-learn, ridiculous-to-master fighting system is wildly enjoyable to play around with (especially against a live opponent), the art and animation are amazing, and the tons of extra content and intricate fighting mechanics ensure that you'll be playing this one long after finishing Arcade mode. 60 bucks might seem steep for a 2D fighter, but trust me: *BlazBlue* has the moves *and* goods to back it up.

Mikel Reparaz

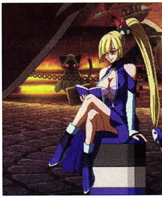
★★★★½

Choose your destiny

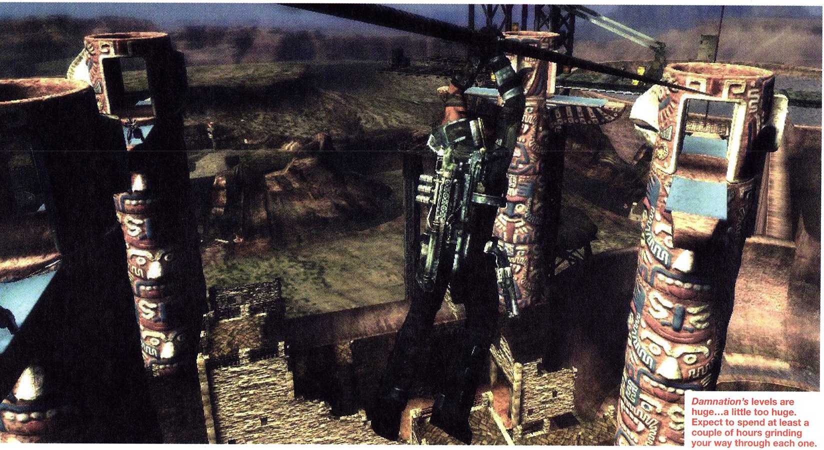
Although *BlazBlue's* Arcade mode features plenty of character dialogue and story, there's a separate Story mode with branching paths and multiple endings per character. But be warned: if you hate lengthy "cutscenes" that amount to spoken text and (mostly) static character portraits, then this mode's reams of exposition and scant one-round fights are guaranteed to infuriate you. On the upside, playing a character's story is an excellent way to learn how to use them better, and *BlazBlue's* weird backstory is interesting enough to reward players patient enough to sit through it (and its surprisingly tolerable voice acting).



Super attacks are huge, devastating, and ridiculously flashy.



Each character has around a dozen color-palette options, some more striking than others.



Damnation's levels are huge...a little too huge. Expect to spend at least a couple of hours grinding your way through each one.

Damnation

Clunkier than a steam engine

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: Blue Omega

PS3 | R

On paper, *Damnation* is an awesome idea for a game. A third-person steampunk shooter with added *Prince of Persia*-style platforming features, it's set in an alternate history in which the Civil War lasted for decades, driving the development of steam-powered high technology. The plot concerns an evil industrialist named Prescott who has mobilized an army of hulking steambots and brainwashed super-soldiers (in bowler hats!) to conquer the remnants of the country. Standing in his way are Rourke—a squarish, acrobatic cowboy armed with a small arsenal of steam-powered weaponry—and his tiny band of freedom fighters. To stop Prescott, they'll need to climb and shoot their way through gigantic levels filled with soaring towers, massive totem poles, and gargantuan military machinery.

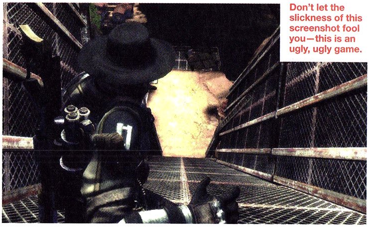
Sadly, the game immediately falls apart in execution. *Damnation*'s action is stiff and clunky, whether you're firing at Prescott's troops or just trying to leap between precarious ledges, and it all has an oddly herky-jerky quality to it. When you shoot enemies, your bullets just make them twitch slightly until they eventually fall over or explode. There's no sticky-cover system, and melee just means barreling into enemies while Rourke robotically swings his fists at the air. And the enemy AI is all over the place; sometimes they leap and climb around the level to outflank you, but they're almost as likely to stand perfectly still while you empty entire clips into their backs.

It's stiff to the point of being laughable, and not even two-player co-op, an enemy-revealing "spirit vision" power, or the ability to occasionally drive motorcycles—which amounts to roaring through twisty, jump-filled tunnels while your partner rides shotgun behind you—can save it.

Although the game's best moments come from its many climbing puzzles, the only real innovation is the cool way Rourke and company flip upward from ledge to ledge. Otherwise it feels like a stripped-down, inorganic knockoff of the last-gen *Prince of Persia* games, with Rourke only able to jump in straight lines between parallel surfaces.

Actually, the whole game screams "last-gen." While some of the weapons and environments are pretty, everything else looks dated, blocky, and flat. That's not surprising considering *Damnation* was originally an amateur mod for *Unreal Tournament 2004.* In a full-price PS3 game it's inexcusable. Add in horrible dialogue and acting, propaganda loudspeakers that drone the same short, loud messages over and over until disabled with a shot, and weird visual glitches that include co-op partners teleporting before your eyes, and you've got unfinished, unpolished steampunk junk that's best left to rust on the scrapheap. Mikel Reparaz

★½



Don't let the slickness of this screenshot fool you—this is an ugly, ugly game.

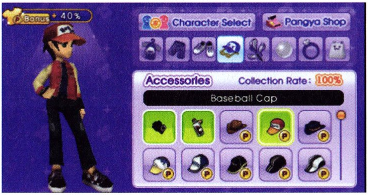
Keep your day job: *Prior to Damnation, developer Blue Omega was a studio known only for producing two horror films, Dark Ride and Danika.*

Pangya: Fantasy Golf

A golf game for anime fans

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+
PUBLISHER: Tomy Corporation DEVELOPER: Ntreev Soft

First, the gimmick: this portable golf game is set on a "fantasy" locale called Pangya Island where residents hold a golf-like "festival" to celebrate a victory over evil achieved years ago with an "Air Lance" (golf club) and "Aztec" (golf ball). That translates into nine fantasy-inspired courses (think dragons, windmills, and snow forests) with 18 anime-style, skin-deep characters such as pirates, ex-cops, and wide-eyed innocent adolescents, and hundreds of purchasable outfits, golf equipment, and potions (like a strength potion you can quaff for an extra boost before taking your shot). The overall story is weak and predictable, but you're not (or shouldn't be) playing *Pangya* for the art style or the characters—you're playing it for the golf, which is wholly adequate.

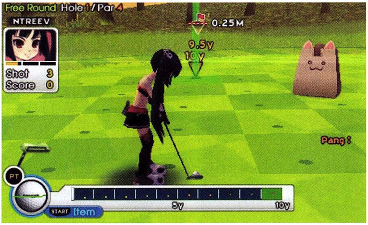


The first time you wear a new outfit onto the course, you earn extra Pang, or money, simply because you look hot.

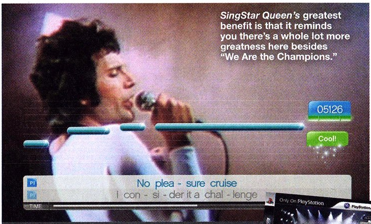
The expected variety of top spins and other power ups that fans of the similar *Hot Shots Golf* series enjoy are present—but *HSG* outshines *Pangya* in one obvious aspect: the putting. In *HSG,* the bumps on the green are displayed in arrows, which move depending on the sharpness of the slopes, and it works fantastically. In *Pangya,* they're displayed with static dots, and you have to mentally work out the slopes yourself. It's an intellectual challenge more than a visual aid, like solving a math problem. But other than that, *Pangya* should provide golf fans (and RPG fans mildly interested in golf) dozens of hours of entertainment with its several modes, gentle learning curve, and unlockable content.

Teresa Dun

★★★½



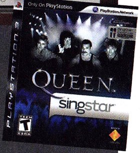
Putting takes thought. Since the static circles are situated on the left side of the squares, that means the ground slopes down to the left.



No plea - sure cruise
I con - si - der it a chal - lenge

SingStar Queen's greatest benefit is that it reminds you there's a whole lot more greatness here besides "We Are the Champions."

SingStar Queen



Bohemian Rhapsody! Put on Bohemian Rhapsody!

PS3 PRICE: $39.99 (GAME ONLY) ESRB: Teen
PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCEE

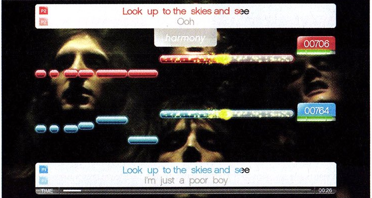
A remarkable consistency shapes the *SingStar* universe. You're either a fan of the series or you're indifferent to it. New song collections come and new collections go with little in the way of innovation to the overall experience. It's only when music that's near and dear to your heart debuts that you even take notice—and so it is with *SingStar Queen*.

Despite a library of mega-hits that include the iconic "We Will Rock You" and "We Are the Champions," Queen never received their just due in the U.S. market. *SingStar Queen's* greatest attribute is that it offers 25 reminders of just how diversely talented Freddie Mercury and his crew really were. With a track list ranging from the operatic "Bohemian Rhapsody" to the retro-Rock "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" to the stirring "These are the Days of Our Lives," there's nary a single weak track on this collection and when you're trying to match Freddie's histrionics note for note, you gain a greater appreciation of his vocal aptitude, and *Queen's* musical genius becomes readily apparent.

The addition of Trophies is welcome and a new voice control menu eases song navigation and selection, but there aren't any further substantive changes. You can nitpick that 25 tracks is down from the usual 30 in these packs, but you can't quibble about the quality of the included tracks, which makes *SingStar Queen* the best franchise incarnation to date.

Roger Burchill

★★★★



Look up to the skies and see
Ooh

Look up to the skies and see
I'm just a poor boy

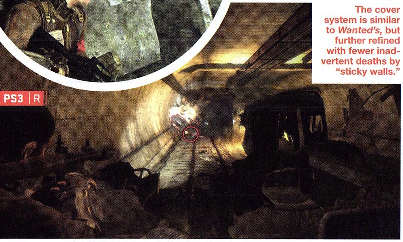
Making the neighborhood dogs howl on your own no longer doing it for ya? Try singing with a friend—in harmony.

PSP | R
PS3 | R

Terminator Salvation

While the weapons-based combat is a highlight, melee attacks are conspicuously absent in *Terminator Salvation.*

The cover system is similar to *Wanted's,* but further refined with fewer inadvertent deaths by "sticky walls."



PS3 | R

Apocalypse meh

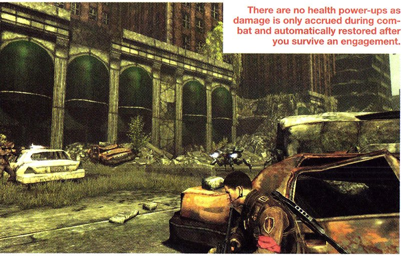
PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Warner Bros. Int. Ent. DEVELOPER: GRIN

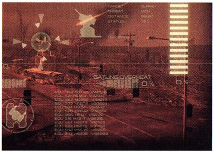
GRIN-developed shooters have an amazing ability to inspire reconsideration. It's not that they're particularly good or bad, it's that they're sure to inspire both critical appraisals. Coming on the heels of the stylish-but-shallow *Wanted: Weapons of Fate* and the competent-but-castrated *Bionic Commando, Terminator Salvation* is the third GRIN shooter to stand scrutiny in as many months. And like its predecessors, it's a game that keeps you second-guessing whether you're too exacting of its attributes or too forgiving of its lapses.

On the plus side, *Terminator* is true to its summer action flick roots: It's good looking, fast-paced, mindless fun. If recreating the movie experience is a licensed-game mantra, the graphics and cutscenes ably mimic the film's stylistic and visual flair. The adequately interesting storyline occurs a couple of years prior to the movie's time setting and helps flesh out the John Connor character as he evolves from basic grunt to Resistance leader. And the refreshingly straightforward gameplay dispenses with adventure game pretenses as it quickly transitions from one firefight to the next.

While the overall progression is decidedly linear, the core combat mechanic works extremely well as each area you enter offers multiple options to use cover to maneuver

There are no health power-ups as damage is only accrued during combat and automatically restored after you survive an engagement.





It's not exactly the most innovative or imaginative scenario ever conceived, but there is something satisfying about facing off against HKs essentially on your own.

and outflank the enemy. There's no smash-crate-to-find-item grind as any and all weapons are prominently highlighted, allowing you to focus on taking down enemies that range from "Wasp" airborne drones to T-7 "Spiders" to T-600 cyborgs. All the enemies exhibit an admirable level of AI and combat awareness, meaning you're not going to get away with über-aggressive tactics for long.

Periodic vehicle-oriented chase sequences add cinematic flair to the game and help maintain *Terminator's* adrenaline-pumping pace. They're really just glorified rail-shooter interludes, but there's something cool and righteous about blasting 'bots to smithereens while being bounced around in the back of a speeding getaway truck.

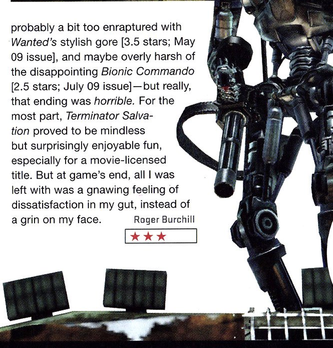
What's not to like? Well, you can easily blow through *Terminator* in less than 10 hours, and like the proverbial bridge to nowhere, the game's saddled with an ending that just sort of peters out. You escape a SkyNet facility, you watch it get bombed in a cutscene, and most disappointingly, an anticipated showdown with a giant "Harvester" mech never materializes. C'mon GRIN, you managed a satisfying story and gameplay build-up, it's about time you guys figured out how to make a decent ending!

So here I sit again, waffling over what score to give a GRIN-developed game. In retrospect, I was probably a bit too enraptured with *Wanted's* stylish gore [3.5 stars; May 09 issue], and maybe overly harsh of the disappointing *Bionic Commando* [2.5 stars; July 09 issue]—but really, that ending was *horrible.* For the most part, *Terminator Salvation* proved to be mindless but surprisingly enjoyable fun, especially for a movie-licensed title. But at game's end, all I was left with was a gnawing feeling of dissatisfaction in my gut, instead of a grin on my face.

Roger Burchill

★★★

A splitscreen co-op mode adds replay value, but you merely play through the single-player experience with a friend.



12 STEPS TO GAMING GREATNESS

Consider this an intervention. GRIN games are so close to being great…or at least pretty good. PTOM offers 12 life-affirming steps that will raise the Swedish developer's game(s) to the next level. Because we care.

STEP 1 Admit you are powerless over your addiction and never develop a licensed-game again.

STEP 2 Come to believe that gameplay can last more than the single-digit range of hours.

STEP 3 It is not a sin to be able to carry more than three weapons at a time. Sure, it's not realistic, but nobody cares.

STEP 4 Fear not rewarding players for finishing a game with unlockables and alternate play modes.

STEP 5 Admit to god, to yourselves, and to fellow human beings that it's evil to end a game with just a cinematic.

STEP 6 Acknowledge that an open-world environment that looks like an open world, but has only one rigid path through it isn't really fun.

STEP 7 Get a new logo—that smile thingy is just creepy.

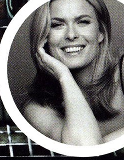
STEP 8 Understand that people like arc and progression—whether in narrative or gameplay. It's been that way for all of recorded history.

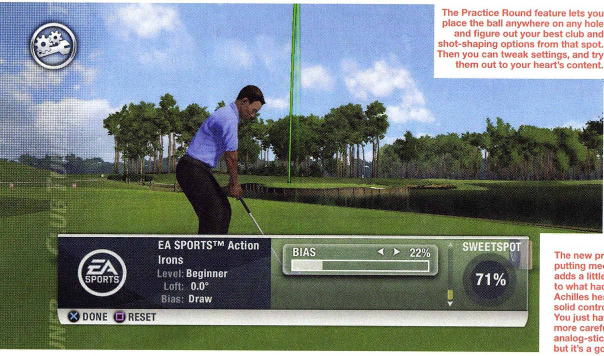
STEP 9 In the real world, people can climb over boxes and manage three-foot drops into ditches, so they sort of expect it in their games too.

STEP 10 Yes, boss battles are cool. But repetitive, pattern-based boss battles are not.

STEP 11 Only you can determine when a game is complete, no matter what the publisher tells you.

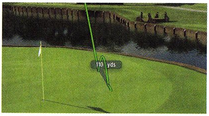
STEP 12 Move out of Sweden. Obviously, the women are distracting you.

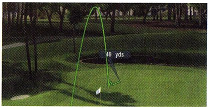




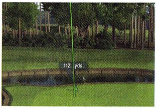
EA SPORTS™ Action Irons
Level: Beginner
Loft: 0.0°
Bias: Draw
BIAS 22%
SWEETSPOT 71%

The Practice Round feature lets you place the ball anywhere on any hole and figure out your best club and shot-shaping options from that spot. Then you can tweak settings, and try them out to your heart's content.





The new precision putting mechanic adds a little challenge to what had been an Achilles heal of *Tiger's* solid control system. You just have to be more careful with your analog-stick motion, but it's a good touch.



Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10

When a game gets a bad knee...

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Sports

Maybe Tiger's absence from the PGA Tour for much of last year, recovering from knee surgery, somehow hobbled the design plans for *Tiger 10.* Sure, this annual golf simulation is functional, but it seems to play with a limp. Each year we expect a slew of fresh features mixing positive steps forward with back-of-box-material gimmicks, but even that list is on the "huh?" side this time out. For golf fans anticipating the U.S. Open's return to Bethpage's Black course this year, maybe the inclusion of this monster for the first time ever will be enough for you to drop $60. For everyone else, your interest likely depends on how much you want to play live tournaments with other players as the real PGA events are played each week.

This tournament feature is certainly intriguing for hardcore fans as the introduction of live weather (courtesy of a deal with the Weather Channel) can update the conditions you're facing on the virtual course to match those the real players face. Frankly, it sucks to play golf in the pouring rain and in gale force winds in the real world, and the only improvement to the experience on a virtual course is the decreased chance of losing your hat or catching your death of cold. Only the Trophies available for getting an eagle in the rain will encourage you to try it out.

Speaking of Trophies, even the balancing of these rewards seems hobbled. A Silver just for watching the credits? (It's in the My Tiger 10 menu, under EA Sports Extras). A Silver for sinking a putt type, that's one of the first challenges at TPC Sawgrass you're forced to complete before you continue?

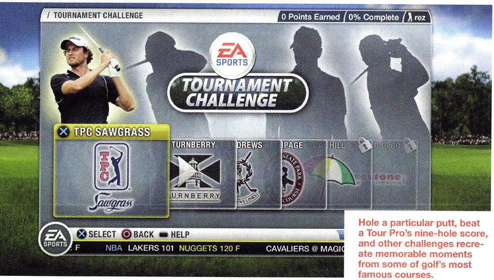
The course challenges are interesting, however, supported by in-game recreations of real world famous moments (and Tiger's special moments are introduced with videos of him explaining the situation). Again, fun and even insightful for hardcore golf fans and aficionados, but likely skipped over quickly by gamers looking to get their stats padded.

Tiger's coach Hank Haney continues to provide challenges and feedback to improve your game as you start a career. Then you play your rounds—at TPC Sawgrass, Bay Hill, Turnberry, and others—earning cash for new equipment that give you greater length and accuracy. It takes a good four or five tournaments (20-some rounds) to practice up to a point where you feel like you're having a fun time and challenging Tiger, Phil, Padraig and the slew of other Tour pros at the top of the leaderboard.

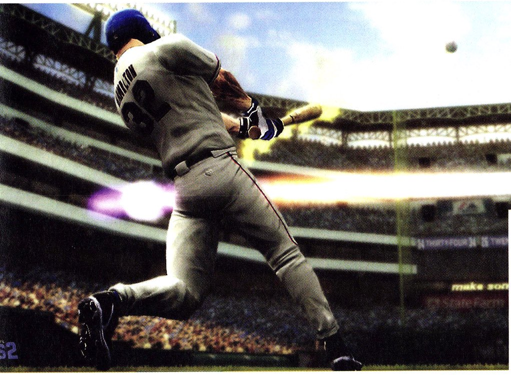
Sadly this year, it's hard to find a compelling reason to upgrade if you played *09.* I mean, all the other functions work as always, so if you've not hit the virtual links for a handful of years, you won't be disappointed…but I was.

Rob Smith

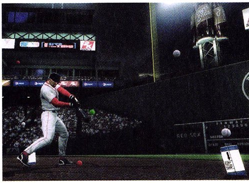
★★★½



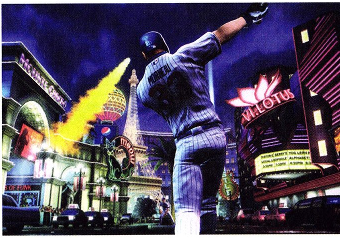
Hole a particular putt, beat a Tour Pro's nine-hole score, and other challenges recreate memorable moments from some of golf's most famous courses.



▲ Pitchers are encouraged to challenge a batter's hot zone, but could miss.



Trick skills are fun enough, and do help refine that swing for the game.



What baseball player wouldn't want to smack balls down a fake Vegas-like street? For points?

The Bigs 2

Welcome back to the big leagues

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Everyone **PUBLISHER:** 2K Sports **DEVELOPER:** Blue Castle Games

Like a rookie returning from his first season stronger and wiser, so *The Bigs 2* arrives in its sophomore season with big intentions of avoiding a fateful slump. The colorful, arcade style of baseball in last year's version has now been matched with a slew of well-rounded game modes and features that result in a rich, entertaining game filled to the brim with heroic antics and athletic stunts.

Last year's disappointing Rookie mode represented the only semblance of a season. This year's model offers the retrofitted Become a Legend mode where, after a season-ending injury, you start in the Mexican leagues and have to earn your way back into the "Bigs." Getting out of the Mexican leagues is easy enough, but it's quite rewarding to customize and build a player through a season and watch him develop into an All-Star.

Hardcore gamers should relish the new full Season mode, replete with up-to-date rosters, stat tracking, player management, and 162 games. More than a handful of other mini-game modes are offered including Power, Glove, Contact, Speed, and Pick-up, plus Tutorial and the always-fun Homerun Pinball. These little games are addicting as standalone challenges, but can turn into all-nighters when a friend joins in. *The Bigs 2* offers a solid online mode with smiley face icons representing how many games opponents have completed, enabling savvy gamers the chance to avoid cheaters and bailers.

Mechanically, every on-field action in *The Bigs 2* is geared toward building your turbo meter and dueling it out in heroic confrontations, whether it's challenging a pitcher for a Big Blast (structurally damaging homeruns), challenging a batter with Big Heat (blazing fastballs), or entering into the Big Slam (a four-batter challenge with the possibility of hitting a grand slam).

Similarly, this year's new Wheelhouse, a colored section of the batter's box indicating a batter's hitting strength, is most likely to create new challenges for batters and pitchers. Strike out a batter by challenging him in his Wheelhouse and you'll permanently shrink his range; but the risk is inherently obvious—that's his power zone, and he's more likely to get a hit when pitched there. Batters must also try to hit away from outfielders with legendary gloves, a new attribute highlighting a fielder's cat-like abilities to snag the deep ball. Developer Blue Castle has balanced nearly every big offensive threat with an equally effective defensive ploy.

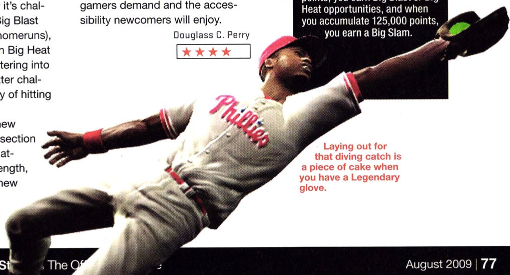
The Bigs 2 answers many of last year's criticisms with a well-rounded arcade experience packed with the depth hardcore gamers demand and the accessibility newcomers will enjoy.

Douglass C. Perry

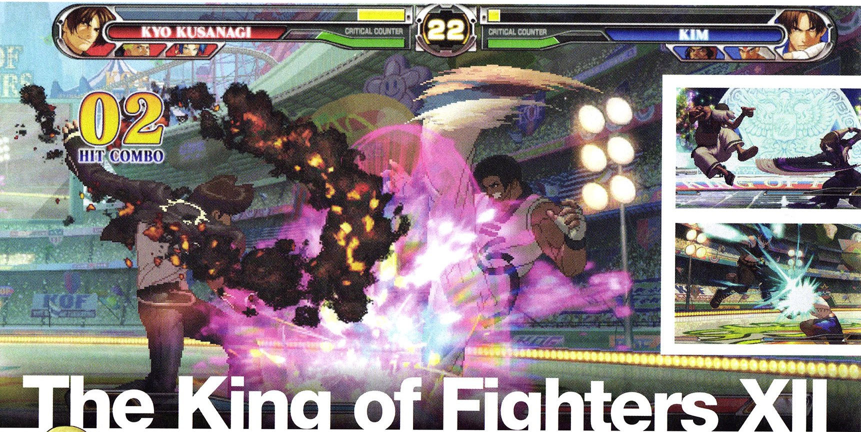
★★★★

Earning Big-Play Points

The Bigs 2 is jam-packed with opportunities to earn Big-Play Points—plays that fill offense and defense meters and reward you with big-play challenges. On offense, you earn points by getting bigger hits, stealing bases, and hitting clutch shots (like a grand-slam). When pitching, they are earned through strikeouts and picking off runners. In the field you earn points by making great catches, throwing out runners, and executing double (or even triple) plays. When you reach 100,000 points, you earn Big Blast or Big Heat opportunities, and when you accumulate 125,000 points, you earn a Big Slam.



Laying out for that diving catch is a piece of cake when you have a Legendary glove.



The King of Fighters XII

KOF XII contains just six stages, all packed with NPCs repeating cheesy two-step animations.

The fall of a dynasty

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Ignition Entertainment DEVELOPER: SNK Playmore

In our July issue, we offered 12 reasons why *The King of Fighters XII* would not only be an excellent game, but might actually be better than *Street Fighter IV*.

Now, having played the full version of the game, we're sorry to report that those fanboy hopes and dreams appear to have fizzled in the cold light of reality.

In actuality, *King of Fighters XII* is a relatively bland game that fails to distinguish itself from older entries in the series (much less from other 2D fighters). It's not a bad fighter, but it does leave us asking, "What's new here? What's exciting?"

The game's basic four-button fighting system will feel familiar to anyone who's ever laid hands on a 2D fighting game: special attacks (fireballs), super moves (really big fireballs), and combos complement your basic array of punches, kicks, and dashes. A few of the 22 characters utilize slightly quirkier fighting styles, but for the most part, it's the same old "quarter-circle + punch" controls we're used to… but without *Street Fighter's* timeless move sets or diverse roster of characters.

KOF XII does add a counter-attack system and "critical counters"—which will only be useful to hardcore players willing to fulfill the very specific requirements necessary to initiate such an attack—but technical defensive maneuvers won't elicit yelps of delight from most players. They are useful techniques, for sure, but they're not particularly glamorous or exciting to execute.

Equally unexciting is the game's selection of modes and additional content. The Arcade mode sticks with *King of Fighters'* classic three-on-three format—which, while creating the opportunity for team-selection strategy, is a real burden for newcomers who have to learn the characters.

It also frames the entire mode as a giant time trial. Naturally, this encourages you to stick with your trio of brawlers and just beat the game over and over again in order to improve your time. Combine this with the lack of story and the limited number of difficulty settings and the Arcade mode quickly becomes repetitive and unfulfilling. At least you can play online, where you can actually create clans and take on opponents as a team.

Finally, we've got the hand-drawn graphics—the one aspect of the *KOF XII* that is irrefutably new. And sadly, they continue the trend of disappointment. The animations are fluid, yes, but even with the soft filter on, the graphics aren't nearly as crisp as those found in *BlazBlue* (see the review on page 71) or *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* (which, by the way, matches *KOF XII* in terms of content but costs just $15 on PSN).

Maybe hardcore fans will appreciate the subtle mechanics at work in *KOF XII,* but as fighting game fans who aren't devoted enough to count frames of animation and the like, we can't help but feel indifferent.

Scott Butterworth

★★★

Sacred 2: Fallen Angel

A guilty pleasure for booty lovers

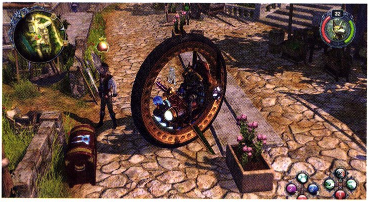
PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Atari DEVELOPER: CDV Software Entertainment

By conventional standards, this fantasy hack 'n' slash, third-person RPG isn't worth your time: it's mindless and unpolished… at least that's what I thought at first. After picking a character (out of six classes, with limited character customization options), I was thrown into a vast, vast world, with little comprehensible story, repetitive gameplay (swing sword and fling spell "X" infinitely), a wonky camera that's effective roughly 50-percent of the time, and an overly simplistic quest system (blindly head toward circles on the map and quests pretty much complete themselves). And yet, I can't stop playing.

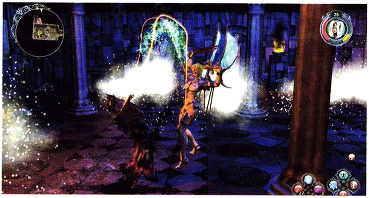
Here's why: I'm addicted to the number-crunching (a calculator is handy when distributing your stats), the combo system (skills become much more satisfying after the first 15 levels), and most of all, the loot collecting. Yes, finding gear that both performs effectively and looks hot on my bombshell Seraphim has overshadowed my early qualms. The flaws don't go away—I still groan when I travel 20 minutes only to find my objective on the other side of a dead end—but they become less relevant the further you get into the game. Add in the mounts (and mounted combat!), the variety of multiplayer options (two-player local or up to four online), and the extremely effective control scheme, and you've got a game that the hardest of hardcore RPG nerds can sink dozens of hours into. If you carry dice in your back pocket, *Sacred 2* is worth a shot.

Teresa Dun

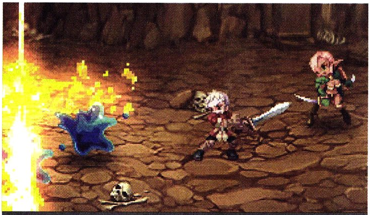
★★★½



Temple Guardians have the most unusual special mount, the Mobiculum. While mounted, not only can Temple Guardians travel faster, but they can also utilize their combat arts.



Yes, my Seraphim ran around with a pair of swords and a thong. I didn't particularly enjoy watching her butt cheeks wiggle as she ran, but you might.

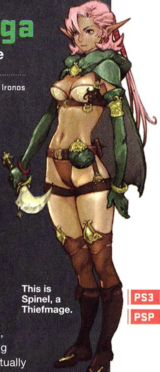


Killian and Spinel, your first two party members. When you win, Spinel's sprite-ly breasts bounce in an oh-so-purposeful way that makes you wonder about the guy who animated her.

Crimson Gem Saga

Almost as great as you want it to be

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Atlus DEVELOPER: Ironos



This is Spinel, a Thiefmage.

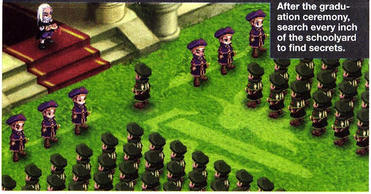
Good news for anyone waiting for a portable Japanese RPG: *Crimson Gem Saga* is both traditional *and* beautiful. Moments after I popped in the UMD, the part of my brain that still clamors to replay *FF IV* actually shut up for a second because the combat, skill-up system, and dungeon crawling in *CGS* is so reminiscent of old-school RPGs. At the same time, the gorgeous, decidedly *un*-antiquated 2D art wooed my eyes. By the time I found three Hamburgers hiding in some stranger's chimney (with the protagonist, Killian, adding in a witty jibe), I thought it could be love. I adore when games reward exploration (and *CGS does*, a hundredfold).

Now the bad news: *CGS* is full of annoyances, too. Party members leave with no warning (taking your equipment with them), some bosses are virtually unbeatable (you're *supposed* to lose), and dungeons are map-less mazes that require backtracking. Also, while the story and characters are adequate, they're not especially memorable.

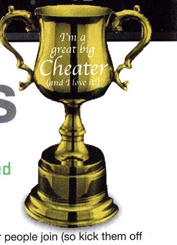
The combat, however, does add a hint of freshness. When a character scores a Critical Attack, tap X to toss free jabs. Characters can also perform powerful group combos when their turns line up. So it's not love, it's a fling. But it's thrilling while it lasts.

Teresa Dun

★★★★



After the graduation ceremony, search every inch of the schoolyard to find secrets.


I'm a great big Cheater (and I love it!)

TROPHIES FOR **CHEATERS**

Who has the time to chase down hard to earn trophies? Carlos the intern doesn't, so he finds creative ways to earn the cheapest trophies. But he shared his secrets with us, so we'll not judge, but learn how to pad our own levels!

Penny Arcade Adventures: On a Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness [PSN]

STRAY CAT You're bound to run into this cat within moments of starting the game.

PACIFIST This should be easy when you begin the game. You will be given instructions to block and counterattack. When you encounter some robots (preferably two) use this time to kill them with a counterattack. In the beginning level your health will recover when it gets too low, so focus on using the counterattacks.

NINE LIVES After you get the cat, hit a robot once to bring its health down and use the cat's special attack to kill it. It's wise to do this in the first level because your health will replenish and you might have to use the cat's special attack a couple of times to kill the robot (the cat's attack deals 1HP damage).

HINT: After your character reaches level two and gains the special attack, use the special attack on a robot and a button sequence event will pop up. Get two consecutive button presses and it should reduce the robot's health to one or two HP and that makes it easier for the cat to kill. Also, you can use Gabe's special attack by filling up the bar but not executing the attack.

CHEATER'S CHECKLIST

Many games have similar Trophy requirements, so make sure you do each of these in all your games and you're likely to hit a bunch of cheapies.

- ☑ PLAY THE TUTORIALS
- ☑ SET BOTS OR DIFFICULTY LEVEL TO EASY
- ☑ KILL YOURSELF
- ☑ PLAY WITH A FRIEND
- ☑ JOIN ANY ONLINE GAME

F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin [PS3]

On the Keegan level (11), there is a tunnel where rats run toward you (it's before you open the bumping shining door). Go into slow mode and lob a grenade at the vermin; you should hit enough to earn the **RAINING MEN** and **DEADLY BALLET** Trophies in one blast.

NOTE: For the next Trophies, the awards are cumulative. All these Trophies can be won on a single play through. If you die or you haven't received it, replay a specific level that has that key element (like when you get the napalm cannon or have to interact with the environments).

SUICIDAL TENDENCIES Just kill yourself five times.

HOME WRECKER On the first level, there are a lot of objects to be flipped: tables, chairs, and potted plants. Flip everything and play the level again if you haven't received the Trophy.

KISS THE COOK As soon as you get the Napalm Cannon, kill 10 enemies.

BANK SHOT Kill 10 enemies that are standing way too close to bombs, gas canisters (in the hospital), or fire extinguishers.

BLINDING TRUTH Near the end of the game you should get a laser, use it to slice up 10 enemies.

SNAKE FIST Kill 10 enemies with melee.

STICK AROUND Pin 10 enemies to the wall with the Hammerhead. All you really need to do is make sure a wall is behind them when you pull the trigger.

DEAD EYE As soon as you get the Sniper Rifle, headshot 10 enemies.

Crash Commando [PSN]

FIRST MISSION Play an objective mission online for the first time. The only requirement is to finish the round.

GLOBE TROTTER Go into multiplayer, create a game, pick deathmatch, max number of players, all maps, low target score, one round, shortest time, easy bots, matching type: friend-chain, and start the game immediately. The point is to get through all eight maps as quickly as possible. Also, try not to have other people join (so kick them off or restart if anyone randomly pops in) and win 20 games to get the **CRASH AND CONQUER** Trophy.

NOTE: For the next Trophies create the same multiplayer format—create a game, deathmatch, standard map, max number of players (up to 12), easy bots, and friend-chain. However, this time choose the highest target score, longest time and rounds. These two Trophies can be done in the same game.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST get all three upgrades 10 times. First try to get the burning (red) upgrade so you can also run over people at the same time. When you get all three upgrades kill yourself and earn them again. While working on that Trophy aim for 20 kills with each weapon to get the **WEAPONS 101** Trophy.

BONUS: While you're trying for these Trophies, you should be able to earn the PROBIE COMMANDO Trophy because all the enemies you kill should earn you 600 points.

Warhawk [PS3/N]

Finishing the tutorial levels earns you the **GROUND POUNDER**, **COMBAT DRIVER**, and **PILOT'S LICENSE** Trophies.

For the **COLLECTOR** Trophy in Collection mode and **HAT TRICK** Trophy in Capture The Flag mode, create a game on any map and enable the "Fly with Objective" option. Hop in a Warhawk and try to get these done before any other players join the game.

Linger in Shadows [PSN]
Spot all the Hidden symbols (see screenshots) throughout the game to get 100-percent of the Trophies.

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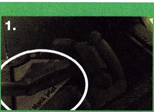

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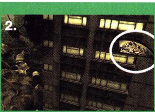

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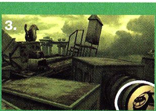

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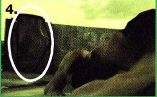

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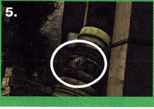

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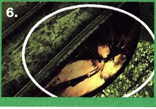

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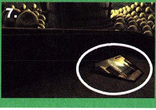

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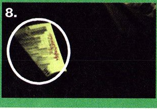

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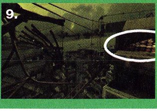


SURVIVALIST Create a game, choose the Archipelago map and Hero mode. Start as soon as possible and survive as hero before any other player joins. Also, in the Archipelago level get inside a jeep and drive off tallest island to an island below to achieve the **DAREDEVIL** Trophy.

BONUS: Collect a proximity mine in a Warhawk, deploy, run over it, and earn the RECKLESS PILOT Trophy.

QUICK HITS

Cuboid [PSN]

Play the game using a walkthrough (easily available with a quick online search) to get 15 Trophies. Leave the game on and your PS3 switched on overnight to get the **DETERMINED** Trophy!

Flower [PSN]

MEMORIES Select a flower to play in. Once you start leave your controller on the floor for three to four minutes and start to play again.

HEALTHY PLAY After playing a level you'll return to the room with the flowers on the windowsill, don't touch your controller for 10 minutes and then press a button or start a level.

WELCOME BACK Exit the game, go to the Date and Time settings (under the Settings tab on the XMB) and advance it a whole week. Play the game again and win the **WEEK LONG BREAK** Trophy.

BEGINNING Bloom all the flowers on the first level, including the three secret groups of green flowers. The first group of green flowers will earn you the **DISCOVERY** Trophy.

flOw In the Pink Flower level, you will be taken on a ride through a valley when you activate the windmills. When you start making left turns stay on the left wall, when you get sucked into a cave stay close to the right side and there you will see characters from the game *flOw*.

STARS On the window sill there is a picture frame; this is the Credits level. In this level each flower has the name of a member from the ThatGameCompany Staff. Bloom all the flowers to send the names into the sky.

Bejeweled 2 [PSN]

PUZZLEMASTER (Gold Trophy) This mode is supposed to be difficult, but you can beat the whole thing by using the Hint button to provide all the moves needed to win.

Shaun White Snowboarding [PS3]

CONNOISSEUR Ride a ski lift from the bottom all the way to the top.

Worms [PSN]

HAPPY FOUR PLAY Play an online game for the first time.

FIFA 09 [PS3]

GIMME FIVE Score five Goals in the Arena.

TIME YOU PLAYED A MATCH? Score 20 Goals in the Arena.

Terminator Salvation [PS3]

Beat the game on Hard and you'll get 100-percent: 11 Gold and one Platinum Trophies.

Noby Noby Boy [PSN]

EAT YOUR WORDS! Eat the words "Noby Noby Boy" within the manual or the staff credits. It has to be in order.

765 Report a length of exactly 765m to GIRL.

10 Take 10 inhabitants for a ride. Stretch as far as you can and get 10 inhabitants to hop on your back.

100 Stretch Boy to a length of 100m. Just keep stretching and you will get this trophy.

THE BOY HOUSE Go into Boy's house and press down on the Right stick to rotate the roof.

Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard [PS3]

IT'S HAZARD TIME! Start your first game.

TAKE 5 Pause the game for the first time.

STRAIGHT-A STUDENT Complete all of the in-game tutorials.

HANDS-ON APPROACH Defeat an enemy using melee combat.

EAT FIST! Perform 10 single-hit melee kills.

FEELING PUNCHY Defeat five enemies in a row using melee combat.

HEADACHE Score 20 headshots.

SAY "NO" TO POTS Shoot 30 potted plants.

FIRE HAZARD Shoot and destroy 30 Fire Extinguishers.

...WHERE CREDIT IS DUE Watch the credits.

VALUE FOR TROPHIES

Which games offer the best Trophy value for your gaming dollar?

Penny Arcade Adventure: OTRSPOD
Three Trophies/$15.99 = **Too Expensive**

Linger in Shadows
100-percent/$2.99 = **Must Buy**

Crash Commando
Eight Trophies/$9.99 = **Worth it** (The other four take time or easy Bot matches.)

Cuboid 100-percent/$9.99 = **Worth it**

F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin
Easy single-player Trophies/$50 = **Worth it** (Multiplayer is easier with friends.)

Flower Nine Trophies/$9.99 = **Worth it**

Warhawk 10 easy trophies/$29.99 = **Worth it** (Multiplayer Trophies are easy if you coordinate your actions with a friend.)

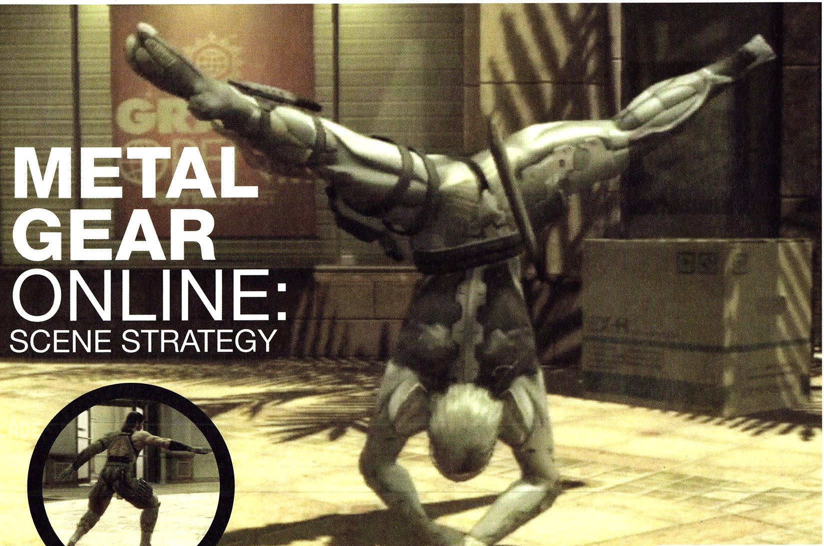
Terminator Salvation 100-percent /$59.99 = **Too expensive** (But worth a rental to earn 100-percent in a weekend.)

EAT LEAD! The Return of Matt Hazard 90-percent-plus/$49.99 = **Worth it/Rental** (Average game, fun Trophies, and great voice acting.)

Worms Two Trophies/$12.99 = **Only for the hardcore**

Bejeweled 2 One Trophy/$9.99 = **Worth it** (If you want a really, really cheap Gold Trophy.)

METAL GEAR ONLINE:
SCENE STRATEGY



What a show off. Oh, sure, Raiden's spin kick is effective, but be sure to build it up from behind cover before moving to attack.

Get the most out of Vamp and Raiden—*MGO's* Odd Couple—in our exclusive in-depth strategy

Raiden and Vamp, the special characters in *Metal Gear Online's* SCENE expansion, break away from *MGO's* usual gun and trap-based gameplay. Their prowess with close-range slicing and dicing will make your *MGO* grunt's Stun Blade look like a Cub Scout penknife. But their similarities are deceptive. Each plays best with a different strategy, and you'll be eating a lot of dirt unless you make use of each one's particular skills.

RAIDEN: White-Blooded Scout

Raiden's melee attacks are more acrobatic than *MGO's* standard punching combo—and more powerful. He'll punch, sweep, and then perform what looks a lot like Chun Li's Spinning Bird Kick. Tap the R1 button repeatedly to extend this move, and direct Raiden's path with the Left-analog stick. Just two hits from this move will sap a full stamina bar, and it can't be ducked, either.

Raiden's spin kick has the same drawback as the rest of his powerful moves: it gives enemies a wide window to attack. Raiden is defenseless during the spin kick's build-up, so take advantage of his maneuverability. Charge up the attack from behind cover, then move into your enemy's path for several quick knockouts.

While holding L1, press back on the Left-analog stick and tap the X button to trigger Raiden's back flip. It's faster and covers more distance than the usual backward hop, and holding back the Left-analog stick can prolong it.

DP:1500
UNDEAD BLADE

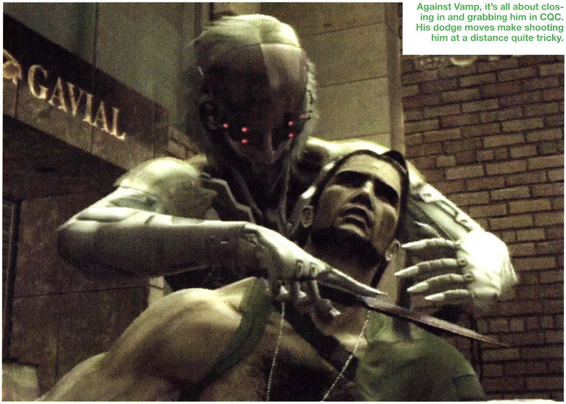
Remember that the HF blade only blocks bullets from the front. (So if you see Raiden with blade raised, flank him for a clear shot.)

CQC EX

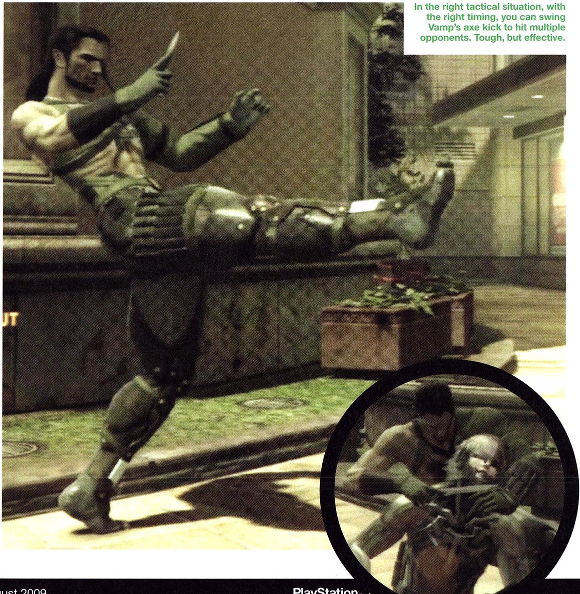
Touted as "the true form of CQC," CQC EX takes all four of your skill slots to equip. The cost might sound high, but the skill proves invaluable when playing CQC-heavy game modes like Team Sneaking and Rescue. CQC EX allows your soldier to counter any regular soldier's CQC attack with a 180-degree spinning throw, putting your would-be assailant on his back and draining one-fifth of his stamina. It's a close-quarters offensive powerhouse, too. Slamming an opponent to the ground will drain almost his entire stamina, capturing an opponent disarms his weapon, and choking puts him to sleep a half-second faster than Level 3 CQC+.

If someone is owning you with CQC EX, try playing with more stealth and less head-on bravado. CQC EX doesn't counter rear CQC attacks. When it comes to a brawl with someone with CQC EX, outmatch his brawn with brains. If this doesn't work—and if you're dead set on getting even—equip CQC EX yourself, as only EX level attacks can break EX's counters.

Snake and Liquid Ocelot have an even stronger version of CQC EX automatically equipped, meaning that not even a grunt with EX equipped can slam or capture them from the front or side. You'll lose half a full stamina bar if you take one of their counters, so think before you snatch.



Against Vamp, it's all about closing in and grabbing him in CQC. His dodge moves make shooting him at a distance quite tricky.



In the right tactical situation, with the right timing, you can swing Vamp's axe kick to hit multiple opponents. Tough, but effective.

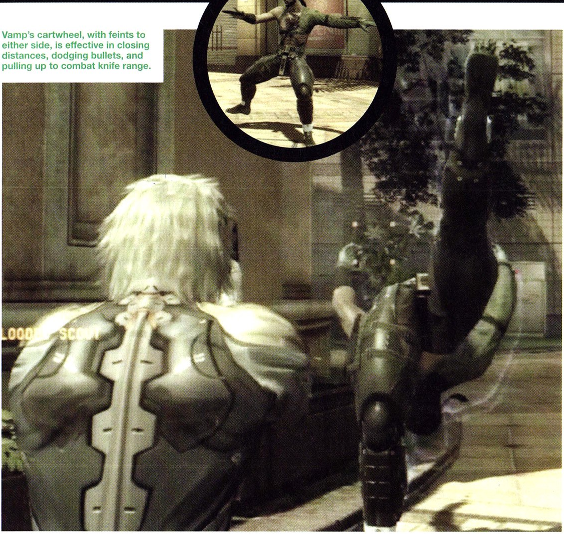
Raiden's melee combo won't trigger as long as you're wielding the HF Blade. Instead, he'll lunge forward to punch an enemy in the gut with the sword's hilt. This attack has great range, takes off a nice chunk of stamina, can be performed whether Raiden's standing or crouching, and staggers anyone it hits. A slow withdrawal follows its fast execution, though, so be sure you take your target down.

The HF Blade will deflect bullets if you hold down L1 without attacking. Raiden runs as fast as usual with the sword raised, leading some players to conclude that Raiden will survive running headfirst into any onslaught. In practice, this strategy leads Raiden to an early grave. The sword only blocks bullets fired at Raiden from the front, leaving him open to rear and flank attacks. Raiden can usually bull-rush a lone enemy and come out on top, but enemy crossfire usually spells disaster.

Knowing the HF Blade's limits can mean the difference between mowing down an enemy and giving him a free close-up headshot. Raiden's sword only blocks bullets when he isn't attacking, and his shield disappears the moment he starts swinging. If Raiden's looking down the barrel of a gun, wait until the enemy has emptied his magazine before you attack.

Players tend to run when they see Raiden coming. Raiden can usually hunt down a single runner, but he risks exposing himself to a headshot if he tries to chase multiple targets. Instead of chasing two or more runners, pull out the Mk.23, turn on autolock, and shoot them in the back before any of them can reload.

Raiden can best dispatch Vamp in close quarters. Once Vamp is within the HF Blade's range, attack with Raiden's sword combo. Bullets might whiz through Vamp's feints, but cold steel won't. If Vamp's dancing proves too slippery for your swordsmanship, switch to Raiden's throwing knives, capture Vamp with CQC, and slit his throat.



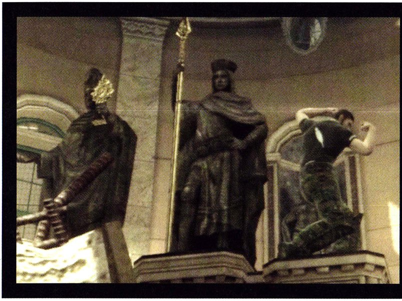
Vamp's cartwheel, with feints to either side, is effective in closing distances, dodging bullets, and pulling up to combat knife range.

VAMP: Undead Blade

Vamp can't block bullets as Raiden can, but he can feint and spin out of harm's way as he did in *MGS2.* To execute a bullet-dodging feint, hold L1 and press the Left-analog stick forward, back, or to the side, and then tap the X button.

Feinting backward will make Vamp pirouette away from his attacker. Hold the Left-analog stick back while Vamp spins to prolong the move indefinitely, but he dodges fewer bullets the more times he dances in retreat.

Vamp's custom melee combo is less versatile than Raiden's, but it can still pack a wallop if used tactically. Vamp trades the melee combo's usual low sweep for an axe kick that knocks off half a bar of stamina—and that knocks your enemy on his ass. The time needed to execute Vamp's axe kick leaves him open to attack, making it best for tactical play rather than straight combat. If a doorway or other narrow opening sees a lot of enemy traffic, wait for



CHARM

In *MGS* one, Otacon famously asked Solid Snake if love could bloom on the battlefield, and *MGO's* Charm skill settles the question with a resounding, "Yes!" Charm lets your regular soldier equip a variation of Mei Ling's attention-grabbing salute. (See the June issue for an in-depth tactical breakdown of Mei Ling's ability.)

With Charm equipped, press the Triangle button to strike a dashing pose in place of the default salute. Anyone passing by will stop, gawk, and drool, enthralled by your magnetism, gender regardless. Charm's effective range is the same as a standard Magazine trap's, and positioning your soldier near corners or windows will help you catch more prey.

Charm is most useful when you're on the attacking team in a Team Sneaking game. Your weapons will disappear if you strike a pose with the Stealth Camo activated, making you totally invisible. Charm achieves the same effects as a Magazine trap without falling into the trap category, and your pose will evade an enemy's Sixth Sense ability. You'll experience a slight delay between the time you release the Triangle button and when you regain total control of your soldier, during which time your quarry can recover from ogling. Use Charm as part of a teamwork strategy. Have teammates nearby put anyone you catch to sleep with tranquilizer rounds.

Used in the right locations, Charm works as unorthodox camouflage. Try striking a stationary pose near the statues or banner ads in Outer Outlet. You'll be surprised how well you blend into the environment—and so will your opponents.

One, two, three, turn, two, three, point, two, three, stab. Raiden and Vamp as new *Dancing With The Stars* contestants?

them on one side and time Vamp's melee combo so that the axe kick hits multiple trespassers at once.

Feinting sideways can help stun an enemy when fighting in close quarters. If an enemy touches Vamp mid-feint (when a white outline appears around Vamp's silhouette), he will stagger and lose stamina. Feint sideways repeatedly near a trapped enemy to knock him out painlessly.

Vamp will dodge bullets while feinting sideways, too, and you can use this to your advantage against multiple enemies in close quarters. If you feint sideways through the group's center, you'll drain their stamina while drawing their fire. Enemy bullets that miss Vamp will hit other enemies. This not only damages the other team with its own ammo, it forces an SOP Lockout on your enemies due to Friendly Fire.

Feinting forward causes Vamp to cartwheel toward an enemy while, again, dodging bullets and draining stamina. If you're trying to close the distance between Vamp and a shooting enemy, alternate between side and forward feints. This will disorient your enemy's aim and, usually, place him in the Combat Knife's range when his ammo runs low.

Vamp's throwing knives deal little damage to an enemy's torso and legs, but they're ideal for headshots, especially against opponents dancing side to side. If thrown from close range, the spread of knives will hit your opponent's head no matter which way he leans.

Two general strategies work when playing Vamp against Raiden.

When fighting in close quarters, feint sideways immediately. This will dodge Raiden's forward thrust and expose his back to the Combat Knife or a CQC grab.

When fighting in an open area, use Vamp's speed to keep Raiden at a distance and autolock attack with throwing knives. Raiden will slow down when deflecting the knives, giving Vamp time to regain lost distance. The outer two knives curve toward Raiden when used on autolock, bypassing his sword's defense and dealing damage. ■

TOUGHNESS

Each level of Toughness protects your soldier from staggers and knockdowns after taking high impact attacks.

Want to stand strong in the face of danger? Then make an appointment with your chiropractor and get used to hang-time. Toughness only levels up when you take a stronger impact than your current level can handle. The Drum Can packs a punch that only Level 3 Toughness can block, making it indispensable for grinding this skill quickly.

Level 1 Toughness: Protects against staggers triggered by weak impacts such as forward rolls, autolock shotgun attacks, and non-fatal headshots, as well as the fire that remains after an oil drum or WP grenade has exploded. Combine Level 1 Toughness with Box Move to lessen the odds of losing your corrugated shell when faced with light attacks intended to disrupt your charge.

Level 2 Toughness: Protects you from pratfalls as well as staggers. It mainly proves useful as defense against close-range, non-autolock shotgun attacks, giving you time to retaliate while your assailant hand-pumps his next round into place.

Level 3 Toughness: Keeps your feet on the ground in the face of attacks that normally send you flying. This includes attacks from grenades, oil drum explosions, Claymore, and C4 traps, and—yes—even Level 3 Box Move's dreaded Box Rush.

Any level of Toughness will prove useful during Capture and Rescue games, but you can become a defensive monster by combining Level 3 Toughness (taking three skill slots) with Level 3 Shield+ (taking one skill slot). Your Shield will guard against enemy gunfire, and your Toughness will keep your grip on the football tight when a stray hand grenade catches you from behind. Remember, though, that you still take damage from impact attacks even if you're immune to their disruptive effects. Even if you die on your feet, you're still dead, so don't run recklessly into danger.

GAMING UNIVERSITY

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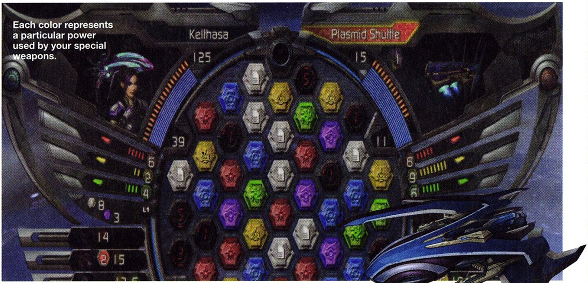
PlayStation Network Games

Downloadable games and add-ons for less than the price of an afternoon at the arcade (these days). We say yea or nay.

+ YEA You'll get full value for your money.

− NAY No legs, no fun, no value.


Each color represents a particular power used by your special weapons.

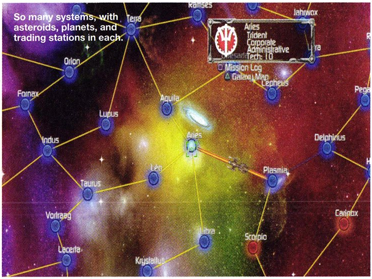
Puzzle Quest Galactrix

PRICE: $19.99 **DEVELOPER:** D3 Publisher

+ Now this is a lot of game. If you consider PlayStation Network titles to be short, throwaway experiences, *Puzzle Quest Galactrix* turns that perception on its head. While you can apply check marks to the usual downloadable game prerequisites like pick-up-and-play difficulty curve and tangible progression in just a 10 minute play session, this gem-matching puzzler's trip into the far reaches of space keeps on giving. If you know the background of the franchise, the core mechanic is familiar—match like-colored gems on a board into combos that fuel special effects, ultimately attacking the opponent's "health."

In space, though, the journey is long and arduous. The Story mode has you taking missions from various planetary councils that involve ousting marauding pirates, fetching this, delivering that (including galactic pizza!), and solving the dilemmas of your ship's crew. You start alone, but can add up to six cohorts who all need taxi service around the galaxy. Along the way you upgrade your ship's offensive and defensive features (by scavenging plans from defeated enemies and crafting items using raw materials from mining asteroids), learn techniques to maximize the gems, and hack jump gates that open up a vast universe for your exploration.

The story and characters are colorful and quirky, with a real cartoon style. Though each challenge can get repetitive, the vast universe to explore, upgrades to find, characters to rescue, and level ups to achieve ensure hours of puzzling, and certainly justify the $20 investment. Rob Smith


So many systems, with asteroids, planets, and trading stations in each.

Hello, Unusual!

AVAILABLE: TBD
DEVELOPER: .theprodukkt

Remember how the $2.99 Trophy-littered *Linger in Shadows* was a product from the underground movement called the demoscene (a "demo" is basically a presentation of art and music rendered in real-time)? Looks like Sony Santa Monica was so thrilled with the response *Linger* got that they're returning with another one. Senior Producer Rusty Buchert explains the newly announced *.deTuned* being created by .theprodukkt: "*.deTuned* is not exactly a game or an art piece… It allows you to create your own visuals to accompany your favorite music tracks on the XMB, and by using the Sixaxis controller, you will be able to manipulate the given scene by interacting with and modifying a man and his world. It even lets you tweak your music as you play with it."

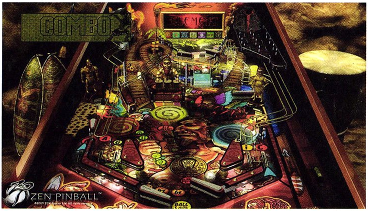
Odd, to say the least. If you're curious, you can check out some of .theprodukkt's earlier work on their website (www.theprodukkt.com). In the meantime, let's try and guess how many Trophies *.deTuned* will have.

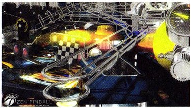
Zen Pinball

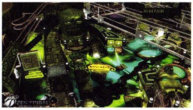
PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** Zen Studios

A year after my sitting in a room with the head of SCEA's game studios and pleading for a pinball game on PSN, it's finally arrived. See, begging can pay off! The four tables in this package all play pretty well, display terrific visual panache, and provide enough challenge to keep you occupied until the first of what we expect to be several DLC tables.

Our top pick is Tesla, an electricity-themed table that's the most balanced of the bunch. El Dorado comes in second with its *Indiana Jones*-style treasure-hunting motif. Shaman has some cool bonuses and moving parts, but some of the table routes can be hard to see even in the best of the five available views. And though V12 is incredibly stylish visually, but its tight play field and some odd angles make it fairly tricky to master.





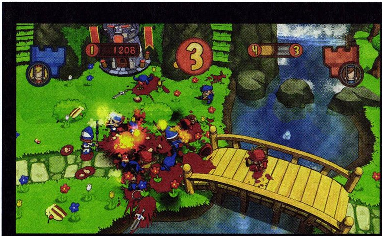


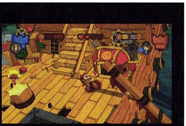
19,850,000
ZEN PINBALL

The physics model is really solid, though each table displayed a couple of odd reaction angles (draining the ball down the side panel straight from the launcher on Shaman for one). I was also happy to be using Gioteck's real triggers for PS3 controllers (cups your finger more naturally on the trigger) to avoid flipper finger slippage when the multi-ball options started to get crazy.

Each table can be played solo or in online events, and connecting to PSN ensures that should you crack the leaderboard Top 10 your name will appear in digital lights in scrolling messages. Simple, fun, entirely worthwhile.

Rob Smith





Coming Soon

Fat Princess

AVAILABLE: Q3
DEVELOPER: Titan Studios

From the unconventional name, you might think *Fat Princess* is a dress-up game. It's not. It's a class-based, third-person multiplayer-frenzy that's part real-time strategy (collect lumber and metal to upgrade your troops) and part action.

From the kiddy graphical style, you might think *Fat Princess* is innocent fun you can play in front of your four-year-old. Again, it's not. It's gruesome and massively bloody.

You'll be able to pick from five different roles (archer, spell-flinger, warrior, healer, and gatherer, essentially) with a slew of typical multiplayer objectives (capture the flag, team deathmatch, etc.) and interactive environmental nuances (like building a siege weapon outside of the enemy's castle…good luck with that).

From our hands-on play session, the game looks like it's shaping up nicely. Our hope is that *Fat Princess'* gameplay delights as much as its unexpected art aesthetic and tongue-in-cheek humor.

WHAT'S IN STORE

This month, we're loving *LittleBitPlanet's* monster costume packs. They're itsy-bitsy-scary-cutesy, and we can't wait to see the YouTube clips they inspire! We just hope they're more *Shaun of the Dead* than *Twilight*.

LittleBIG Planet
ADD-ON

SACKULA
(Hair, pants, jacket, and coat)

LittleBIG Planet
ADD-ON

BRIDE OF SACKULA
(Hair, pants, dress, and cloak)

LittleBIG Planet
ADD-ON

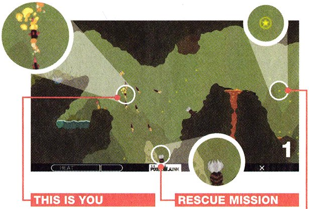
WEREWOLF
(Head, torso, tail, and trousers)

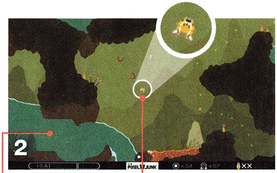
LittleBIG Planet
ADD-ON

ZOMBIE
(Torso, legs, and skin)

Your Next Addiction

A Picture Guide to the forthcoming *PixelJunk Shooter*





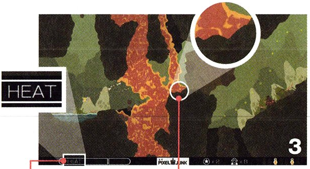
THIS IS YOU
You control a subterranean vessel and have two tools: a missile launcher and a grappling hook. Your one major weakness? Heat! Stay away from lava and don't rub against walls. If you overheat, your engines fail and you die.

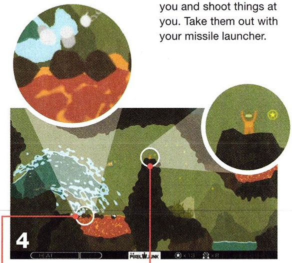
RESCUE MISSION
Your goal: rescue poor souls trapped and scattered in subterranean caverns. Fly to this one and pick him up with your grappling hook.

STAR NABBER
Collect gold stars to earn extra lives.

STAY COOL
If your engine starts to overheat, dive into water to cool off.

ENEMIES
Hostile subterranean creatures don't want you invading their space. They'll chase you and shoot things at you. Take them out with your missile launcher.



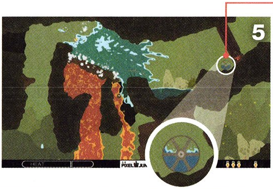


INTERFACE
From left to right: your heat meter, a gold star counter, a counter that tells you how many lives you have left, and a visualization of which workmen you've rescued on the stage—and which you've let die.

IT'S A LAVA-FALL!
If lava blocks your path, you can use your missiles and try to shoot a small strip of space to weave through…but it's probably better to take an alternate path, like the one leading upwards.

CHEMISTRY LESSON
When water meets lava, it turns into rock! Rock isn't as hot, and you can chip away at it with your missiles, thereby safely reaching new areas. Creatively solving environmental puzzles is what this game is all about.

FRAGILE
Just be careful. Workmen aren't invincible and they'll die if you lead a path of lava across them.



NIFTY ITEMS
Several items, like this water wheel, help you deal with the lava. Grab it with your grappling hook and drop it over the lava. Another cool item is the sponge—drag it through water and watch it soak up a large supply for you to use.

STAGE CLEAR!
You'll have to perform certain feats to unlock the path to safety and clear the stage. Expect our review of *PixelJunk Shooter* near its release this summer.

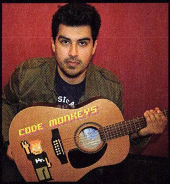
PIXELJUNK MONSTERS DELUXE

Really? *PixelJunk Monsters* on PSP? Does the world honestly need another *PJM* game? Duh, of course! This PSP version of the tower defense game will feature all the stages from *PJM* and *PJM Encore*, but with tweaks and enhancements.

PJMD will feature a brand new island with 10 stages, seven new music tracks, and new enemies, though some of these "new" enemies are just upgraded versions of old favorites. In the demo, familiar spiders were blown into levels by balloons, which had to be popped before you could shoot the spiders themselves. You'll also be able to use two new towers: an XP Tower (grants an experience point boost to nearby towers) and a Trap Tower (use two and monsters will be stunned between them). All these new additions should be more than enough reason to dive back into *PJM.*

PSN Video Delivery Service

Code Monkeys' Adam de la Peña reveals all about the world's most dysfunctional fictional game studio



New this month to the PlayStation Network Video Delivery Service: *Code Monkeys,* an 8-bit animated comedy featuring a wildly diverse group of game designers with a severe toilet-humor obsession. We chat with creator, writer, director, and star of the series Adam de la Peña about arcades, chilidogs, and Tommy Chong. Oh, and his TV show.

PTOM: So what was the original inspiration for the show?

Adam de la Peña: I worked in an arcade throughout my entire college career at UCLA—the biggest arcade in California. I ran it, actually, and something good had to come out of that experience. I was like, "One day, this will be a show." I know a quite a bit about videogames through that and about the people who play them and the people who make them.

Did the characters come from experience as well?

Yeah, it's kind of like a lot of stories where it's very talented people working for a moron, and the moron essentially not knowing anything about his business or his area that he's managing. You find that a lot in life; like, the people that don't know anything are the people somehow in charge. You have these guys like my character Dave—who's lazy and a jerk but at the same time very good at his job—and they sort of get infiltrated by this guy Larrity—who bears no resemblance to President Bush—who doesn't know what the hell he's doing.

There's some arguably offensive material in *Code Monkeys.* Did you ever have problems with people getting angry or the network trying to censor you?

Oh yeah, we had to pull material. There's no rhyme or reason to it, though, I'll tell you that much. We got in trouble for small things. We couldn't say certain words and we could only say certain words so many times. I had written this script where they go to "Rapeville Penitentiary," and [the network] was like, "You can't say 'Rapeville.'" And I was like, "Whoa, it was in the script and it's the name of a place and the whole episode essentially revolves around it." They were like, "Okay, you can use it once." And then it became this fine list of terms we couldn't use. They would call me and say, "We know what chilidog means." And I would be like, *"I* don't know what it means." So then we had to start inventing terms like "flapjack." Like, "Yo, that dude got flapjacked." So that was fun too. But then we got away with a whole episode about the Cockgoblin, and I don't know how we did it. I don't know what happened there. Someone apparently fell asleep at the wheel.

What do you think was the most offensive thing ever that you couldn't run?

The pilot. I think what happened was [the network] thought they were going to be like a TV-M something rating and then they realized they had to conform to this other rating, and the pilot is unairable under those circumstances. Dave's naked through half the pilot. He's yelling, he blows stuff up, there's swimming in pee. There's a monkey that skull-humps one of the employees and Dave is screaming that he's giving her an ear job. The pilot's unrunable; it's fantastic, it's probably my favorite thing. Hopefully, they'll give it to PSN.

Your show has had quite a few really notable guest stars: Steve Wozniak, David Jaffe, Gary Gygax. How did you pull that off?

It was my company doing it and not G4, you know what I mean? It was me reaching out and just making a really concerted effort. I'm friends with Steve Wozniak through the show, and we're still friends. He's the best dude ever. He actually came down one day just to do a spot with me, and I'm like, "Steve, why are you here? You here for a conference?" And he was like, "Naw, just came down to see you, do this thing." I was like, "You're the best dude ever!" Dave Jaffe, we called him up and he was awesome, he's like, "I love Code Monkeys. I'd love to do it." Everybody on the show did it for, like, nothing, and they always went out of their way to help us and we always appreciate it. Tommy Chong came by one day and did it. We based this whole episode around him so if he said no we were screwed, but he said yes.

What's the status of the show right now?

I think where it stands at the moment is that we're on a break like we always are, and I think before we do anything for the television show, we're going to do something special with it online. It's under wraps right now because we haven't decided what, but we're trying to do something where it's like special content just for people that get the show on the 'net and have bought it and are real fans of the show who want to find it. Basically, new stuff that features the main characters and their lives.

Top Ten VDS Downloads

Family Guy. But not exactly a family show.

What TV shows are your fellow PSN members downloading the most? Here's the leading ten shows at press time:

- ***Family Guy*** **Season 7**
- ***Smallville*** **Season 8**
- ***Deadliest Warrior*** **Season 1**
- ***Heroes*** **Season 3**
- ***South Park: Uncensored*** **Season 13**
- ***The Office*** **Season 5**
- ***Supernatural*** **Season 4**
- ***Prison Break*** **Season 4**
- ***24*** **Season 7**
- ***Fringe*** **Season 1**

Letters

Feedback, Insight, Delusions, and Carlos the Intern gets a letter

21

Number of emails received that demanded to know the release date of a particular game

21

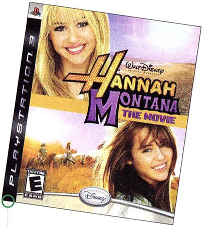
Number of those emails we deleted

INTERNMENT

Dude, Carlos, you are SO lucky. You've got the greatest job in the world. Not only do you get to listen to Ken go on and on about some stupid sport called "soccer," you get to clean up after Rob and Roger (those two are such slobs!) and you get to spend most of your day wondering what crazy stupid thing Scott's going to come up with for you to do next! (And you get to be in the same vicinity as the lovely Teresa all day.) I don't know what you're complaining about. If you don't watch it, Minh T is gonna have your job! Then what are you going to do? Get a job that actually pays you money?! Ha! Where's the fun in that? Anyway, after you get done breaking down boxes, cleaning all of Ken's trophies, giving Scott his sponge bath, and licking Roger's shoes, just remind yourself what a great job you have. And your taste in eclectic movies and music is way better than Scott's. Don't let him tell you otherwise. Ciao!

Rob, via email

Your knowledge of the inner workings of our office is rather disconcerting. We're starting a camera sweep—we need to make sure nobody sees that sponge bath footage for legal reasons.

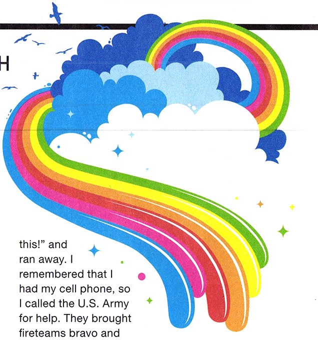


LOVE...

I play a lot of videogames—mostly RPG's, both puzzle and action. I'd get frustrated when friends would spout, "The only way to prove you're a better gamer is to pick up the controller and beat me in Madden." I always got left on the bottom rung. Now, with Trophies, my friends are the ones sitting at the bottom while I stand tall at Level 7 waiting for them to pass Level 2. Trophies allow true, all-around gamers to show off their skills and abilities to the world. The only bad thing is that all my friends now know I played the new *Hannah Montana* game.

Jeremy, via email

Just tell 'em you only played the *Hannah Montana* game for the Trophies. That's what we did (except for Roger, he's actually a…fan. So wrong, but true.)



LETTER OF THE MONTH

SEE WHAT HE DID THERE?

I was jogging on the beach when all of a sudden a plane landed. A man named Jack and his pet Dax came out and asked me if I could help his people. I said, "My hair is spiky enough; let's go." After a while, we were above his island. He said, "It's an uncharted island. Isn't it beautiful?"

Then out of nowhere, a warhawk-like plane attacked us and made us crash into a tree. After getting out of the twisted metal wreckage and climbing down the tree, these bandits surrounded us. They were making a noise like "Coot Coot Coot"…I think they were saying "cut." When they were about to kill us, Jack's people emerged from the bushes with swords that looked like ratchets. One of them threw his sword at a fat, slow bandit, and I could have sworn I heard a clanking sound.

After this battle (or more like a resistance), I asked what was happening because I was in a haze of confusion. They said they were protecting their gold from the infamous god of warts Okage and his bandits, and the only person who could help them was El Caballero Blanco with his divine sword, solid metal armor with gears on top of it, and magic stardust powder.

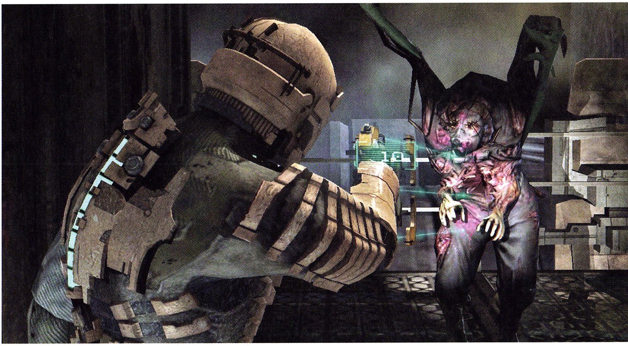
They thought I was this knight, so they left me to fight the bandits by myself. I went to their lair to fight them, but when I was about to go in, I saw a colossal shadow and said to myself, "F*** this!" and ran away. I remembered that I had my cell phone, so I called the U.S. Army for help. They brought fireteams bravo and delta to take the bandits down while I watched from afar.

It was a kill zone: Bodies were flying everywhere and there were lots of explosions. After we captured Okage, we gave him to the natives. They did horrible things to him (made him watch *Catwoman* 12 times), but we got some of the gold and said to them, "It's a big yet small world. We will meet again."

Edwin, via email

There's something very strange about your little story, Edwin, but we just can't seem to put our finger on it…

> "They left me to fight the bandits by myself. I went to their lair, but when I was about to go in, I saw a colossal shadow and said to myself, 'F*** this!' and ran away." >>



Okay, so ***Dead Space*** **is for "Mature" audiences. But really, it's just a revealing introduction to physiology.**

...AND HATE

I HATE TROPHIES! They make gamers lose sight of what's important in games: having fun! Trophies are great only when they reward gamers for being good (headshots, kills, finding hidden weapons, etc.). Unfortunately, most Trophies make you play the game in a terribly awkward way ("BEAT THE GAME WITH ONLY THE SQUIRT GUN!!!") But the worst Trophies of all are Trophies based on DLC that you have to pay for. You want that Platinum Trophy? That'll be another $15 (case in point, *BioShock).* I already paid for the game once; shouldn't that be enough to get all the Trophies? Or are games just being left incomplete to squeeze another dime out of gamers? *Jake F., Maryland*

We're inclined to agree that having fun is more important than earning Trophies, but more importantly, you're totally right about Trophies and DLC. Forcing people to buy downloadable content in order to earn all of a game's Trophies feels a bit like extortion. But c'mon, how many game types or play styles have you tried (and found to be fun or interesting) to earn that pop-up. When executed right, they can add the fun. Or you can cheat, which we absolutely despise, and would never promote (so don't turn to page 80...don't).

CAPTAIN CAPTION

How do you folks come up with the captions for the pictures in your magazine? Is there one person that has this responsibility or is it a cumulative effort?

Jason, via email

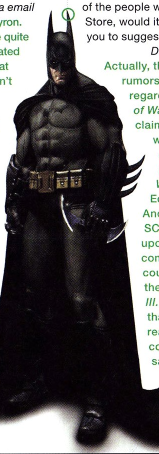
Actually, Jason, we have a specialist in charge of dealing with this very situation. He captures captions in the wild and then tames them so that they may be used in our magazine. However, despite his many years of service here at PTOM, we have no idea what he looks like...mostly because we just made him up right now. Fan art submissions welcome.

FOR MATURE AUDIENCES ONLY

Why are almost all your articles about Mature games? I'm not allowed to play M-rated games, so I have nothing to read about in your magazine because it's pretty boring to read about something that you can't play. The *Batman: Arkham Asylum* story was pretty cool, but that's because I can play it. Seriously, I mean, could you talk more about some E- to T-rated games?

Byron, via email

It's nothing personal, Byron. There just happen to be quite a few exciting Mature-rated games in development at the moment. But we don't discriminate – we had Roger's son run his young critical eye over several kids' games in the Feb. issue. Much of the time, when we preview a game, it has yet to be rated (though you don't need a social psychology degree to figure *GTA, God of War,* and the upcoming *Bayonetta* [page 24] might earn an adult rating). Looks cool in the pictures in the mag, though, no?

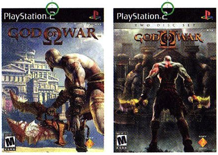


GOD OF MORE

I am interested to know whether or not *God of War I* and *II* will ever be released in the PlayStation Store. I am a proud owner of an Xbox 360 and they have *Fable* one as a downloadable game due to its popularity, so why not have the first two *God of War* games in the PS Store? If this isn't already on the minds of the people who run the PS Store, would it be possible for you to suggest it?

Daniel C., via email

Actually, there are several rumors floating around regarding the old *God of War* games. One claims that both will be available on Blu-ray as part of a *God of War III* Special Edition package. Another claims that SCEA is working on updated backwards compatibility that could coincide with the release of *GoW III.* But the folks that matter will be reading this, so consider the message delivered.



Listen up, SCEA: The people have spoken and they want ***GoW I*** **and** ***II*** **in the PlayStation Store...*now!***

Overheard this month in the PTOM offices:

"But I'm afraid of phones!""

Haiku and you!

You guys really need to start following us on Twitter (twitter.com/P_TOM). Not just because you love us but for a chance to win fabulous prizes! We recently asked our followers to write some PlayStation and PTOM-related haikus, and after careful consideration, our panel of judges (including special guest judge Veronica Belmont, host of Qore) selected the following winners:

H.M. Lamb decided to go the game-specific route, riffing on hilariously annoying *Call of Duty* antics:

Mister juggernaut,
Do you really need that perk?
Would you please just die?

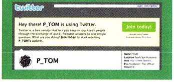
Mahlon Person, on the other hand, decided to try a little flattery…and clearly it worked!

Read your mag monthly
Previews, reviews, and game news
Without the suckage

And **Jennifer Sigman** really just summed everything up perfectly:

Epic battles and
Long days ending with sore thumbs,
What more could you want?

Congratulations to these guys, and thanks to all who entered! Think you can do better? Send your PlayStation haikus to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com with the subject line "Haiku." You might just see it printed here next month!



Hey there! **P_TOM** is using Twitter.
Twitter is a free service that lets you keep in touch with people through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing? **Join today** to start receiving **P_TOM's** updates.

P_TOM

MAG MAGIC

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

How long does it take to make one of the magazines? Does it simply take a little under a month? Enough time for you to get material, put it together, edit it, and then ship it out to repeat the process? Do you already have several future magazines lined up in the queue just waiting to be shipped away like eggs in a carton? How do you guys do it? Do you just hang around and say "Hey, that's a popular (or interesting/[insert adjective here]) gaming topic that people would want to hear about. Let's throw that in." I really like the final product that is presented, though I care more than just that it is, but I wonder how it came to be.

Nick, via email

We usually just wait until the last minute and then pull a bunch of random stuff off the Internet… no, but seriously, it's a little bit of everything you mentioned. We've got four weeks to put each issue together (which includes all the writing, editing, and shipping), so each one ends up being a healthy mix of strong planning and last minute changes to make it as current as possible. But hey, it always works out in the end (though Ken usually requires a week's break to recover from the editor-induced rush)!

LOGIC FTW

I just got done reading the letters from the June issue. I noticed that in the Free Things Suck letter the writer stated that people in the boonies cannot earn Trophies that require online play. What Doyle41 fails to realize is that if people in the boonies cannot earn online Trophies due to their lack of high-speed Internet access, they would also be unable to download the system update that enabled the Trophy system in the first place! System updates don't come on discs now do they? USELESS!

Tacozed, Williamsport PA

As you crazy kids would say, "PWNED!" We're using that term correctly, right?

A LETTER IN EIGHT PARTS

Regarding your June issue and whatever previous issues that have been littered and over exposed with *Final Fantasy XIII* articles: I don't get it.

[Oh man, bet you love this month's cover, huh?]

Why are you guys (and gals) so high on this game? I used to think the world of *Final Fantasy.* I still, on occasion, whip out *FF VII* and play it some, easily my favorite out of all the entries.

[You might have just answered your own question there, dude.]

But for me, *Final Fantasy X* was the last game that had any impact…and I know why. *X* was the last *FF* developed by Square Soft before merging to become Square-Enix. Nothing following *X* has been anything of interest that hasn't ripped off every previous title in their own library.

[Actually, Square developed and released three more *Final Fantasy* games between *FF X* and the merger (which probably didn't have a direct impact on the development team anyway). And let's be fair: they're all rip-offs.]

Graphics don't make a game. It needs substance. You're not going to buy a tricked out Mountain Dew bottle with sparkles and skulls if there's no Mountain Dew in it, are you?

[Ok, we laughed really hard at this part…but probably not for the reasons you were hoping.]

I never played *XI,* but there wasn't enough going for it for me to be interested. *XII* was a joke in my opinion. The characters all look exactly the same: just change the hair or make up and you've got a different character! Not to mention the fact that it's hard to tell what sex some of them are…

[Yeah, but isn't this true of just about every JRPG?]

I won't even get into the butchered fighting system that tried to

"Whipped out."

FINAL FANTASY VII

contact Send your thoughts and comments to PTOM_letters@futureus.com. We *may* get around to answering them between gaming sessions.

System Update | What you need to know

8 GAME TRADING ON TRIAL

Publishers and retailers plead the case for and against trading used videogames

FOR THE PROSECUTION

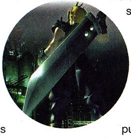
GameStop's Gross Sales vs. Profit

FOR THE DEFENSE

MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

«PTOM July issue: breaking down the game trading debate.

give me herpes. It felt nothing like a *FF* game and I returned it; happy I got away with it being a rental. **[Herpes? Are you sure you're playing these games right?]** Also, I don't expect anything other than the exact same plot from the previous 12 games in which an evil empire/person takes over and you and your five-(ish) friends will need to stop him. And, coincidentally, you're the only ones able to do so. Sums up *FF XIII's* plot, doesn't it? But wasn't that *FF VII's* plot too? And *FF X's*? **[Well this also describes the plot of, like, every action film and adventure game ever made, including the early *Final Fantasy* games you claim to love so much.]** I'm simply confused as to how so many critics are getting so happy in the pants over this game already. The only games I can think of that lived up to the ridiculous hype that was put on them—a lot by you guys—were *Metal Gear Solid 4* and *Killzone 2*. I don't see *FF XIII* doing the same.



Tyler Hurning, via email

You know, Tyler, you may actually have a real point there at the end. Is it possible that we, the games press, sometimes create unreasonable expectations for upcoming games? Possibly. Our goal is to create awareness, not hype. But if we're excited about something, we're obviously going to share our excitement with you. Remember that we're just gamers like you, and we're going to cover what we find interesting...even if it doesn't interest you.

USED AND ABUSED

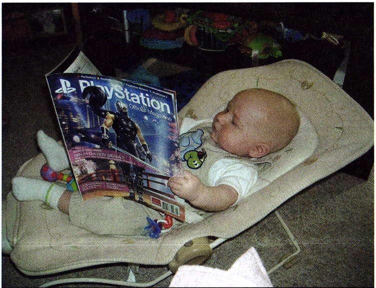
I will be the first to admit that gaming is an expensive hobby. What I can't stand is the way cash strapped gamers (who try to support the gaming industry as much as they can) are sometimes compared to pirates.

I understand there are many out there that steal. I also understand that the developers and publishers desperately rely on the money brought in by every single game produced. The thing is there are always going to be gamers who don't have the money to buy four to six new games at $60 each. I have a wife, two young boys, and bills up to my neck to take care of first, but I will wait until a used game is at my local GameStop instead of stealing it from somewhere online.

So I guess my question to you is: Is purchasing a used game really as bad as online piracy? If it is, what can retail stores, developers, and publishers do to remove the stigma placed upon gamers who buy used? Oh yeah, how many of the PTOM staff have recently bought a used game?

Willie Z., Indianapolis IN

Well Willie, the short answer is no, buying used games is not as bad pirating games since piracy is actual theft. However, the comparison between piracy and used game sales isn't entirely invalid because in both cases, the people who actually created the games get absolutely no money. So on a moral level, the two are not equal, but the consequences of both are the same. As for what can be done about it, well, that's what the industry is currently trying to figure out. Should developers get a cut of GameStop's used game profits? Probably, but that's not something we can simply decide. For now, you can do what the PTOM staff does: buy new or trade with your friends.



Adorable Indoctrination

Dear PTOM,

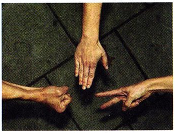
I just wanted to say that I love your magazine and I look forward to it every month even though I am only five months old. Here is a photo of me reading about some of the new games coming out in your Previews section. I especially enjoyed your world exclusive on *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2* last month. Unfortunately, I probably won't be able to play it until 2025 because my lame-o dad won't let me play M-rated games. Anyway, keep up the good work!

Your "smallest" fan, Aidan

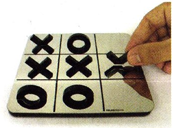
Game, Set, Match

We decided to go a little easier on you in our June ratings contest by listing a few early strategy games in honor of *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3*. But our lucky winner **Colby Brown** not only identified the images correctly but also provided us with some pretty entertaining explanations:

"This tactical strategy RPG is commonly known as chess. In it, two players compete by each controlling a kingdom with the intent to force the opposing king into admitting defeat. This game can be played with or without a time gauge."

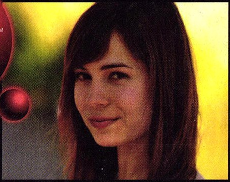


"This game is called 'Paper, Rock, Scissors' and is one of the first free multiplayer games ever. Each player must choose between three 'characters,' each with a strength and a weakness. (Think water beats fire, fire beats ice, etc.) Some hand-eye coordination is required, and players who suffer from lag are disqualified."



"This picture represents Tic-Tac-Toe, a simple turn-based strategy game where players compete to form a line of Xs or Os. This game has very high replayability and is perfect for noobs."

Presented by the PlayStation Network



Qore host Veronica Belmont

AVAILABLE NOW!
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Frag Dolls

QORE EPISODE 13

Featuring inFAMOUS, Fight Night Round 4, PSPgo and The Frag Dolls

This episode marks a special milestone for Qore—its first birthday! When the PlayStation Network launched the show a year ago, we were very excited about the opportunity to give gamers a unique glimpse into the world of PlayStation.

We want to thank everyone for their support during this fast and furious year for PlayStation Network's first original production. The Qore team's got some magnificent stuff cooking for the next season.

And now, the episode at hand:

Almost inFAMOUS
We head to Seattle to visit Sucker Punch to witness the fascinating way they've created "karma" in their electrifying PS3 debut. We also utilize their development rig to capture the amazing particle effects of the game in super slo-mo.

Lords of the Ring
Muhammad Ali is the self-proclaimed 'Greatest of All Time.' Mike Tyson was unstoppable in his prime. EA's Fight Night Round 4 provides the setting for the ultimate fantasy boxing match as Veronica visits the passionate pugilists at EA Canada to go a few rounds and stir up the debate.

go is a Go!
Sony takes the wraps off its latest PSP hardware—the PSPgo. We've got an exclusive hands-on look with SCEA's Director of Hardware Marketing, John Koller.

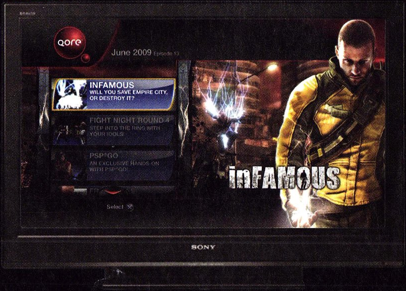
Playing With Dolls
For the past five years, the Frag Dolls have been "ambassadors" of competitive gaming. How do these ladies handle themselves in a predominantly male-dominated activity? What does it take to join one of the most well-known clans in gaming? Veronica Belmont finds out as she competes for an opening on the Frag Dolls' roster.

Everyone who downloads Qore this month will receive an excusive inFAMOUS PS3 "Bad Karma" theme as well as Qore T-shirts for Home that you can wear with pride! Enable the T-shirts in Qore and access them through your Home wardrobe. New Qore subscribers will also receive High Velocity Bowling.

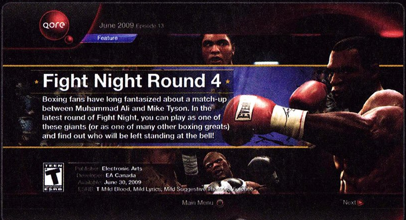
Finally, to commemorate the release of a slew of new PSone classics on the PlayStation Store, we're offering all Qore purchasers the original Spyro the Dragon.

Qore Episode 13 is available for download NOW, price $2.99!

inFAMOUS


qore
June 2009 Episode 13
INFAMOUS
WILL YOU SAVE EMPIRE CITY, OR DESTROY IT?
FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 4
STEP INTO THE RING WITH YOUR IDOLS!
PSP®GO
AN EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON WITH PSP®GO!
Select
inFAMOUS
SONY

Fight Night Round 4



Fight Night Round 4

Boxing fans have long fantasized about a match-up between Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson. In the latest round of Fight Night, you can play as one of these giants (or as one of many other boxing greats) and find out who will be left standing at the bell!

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: EA Canada
Available: June 30, 2009
ESRB: T Mild Blood, Mild Lyrics, Mild Suggestive Themes, Violence

PSPgo

Photograph by Mark Madeo

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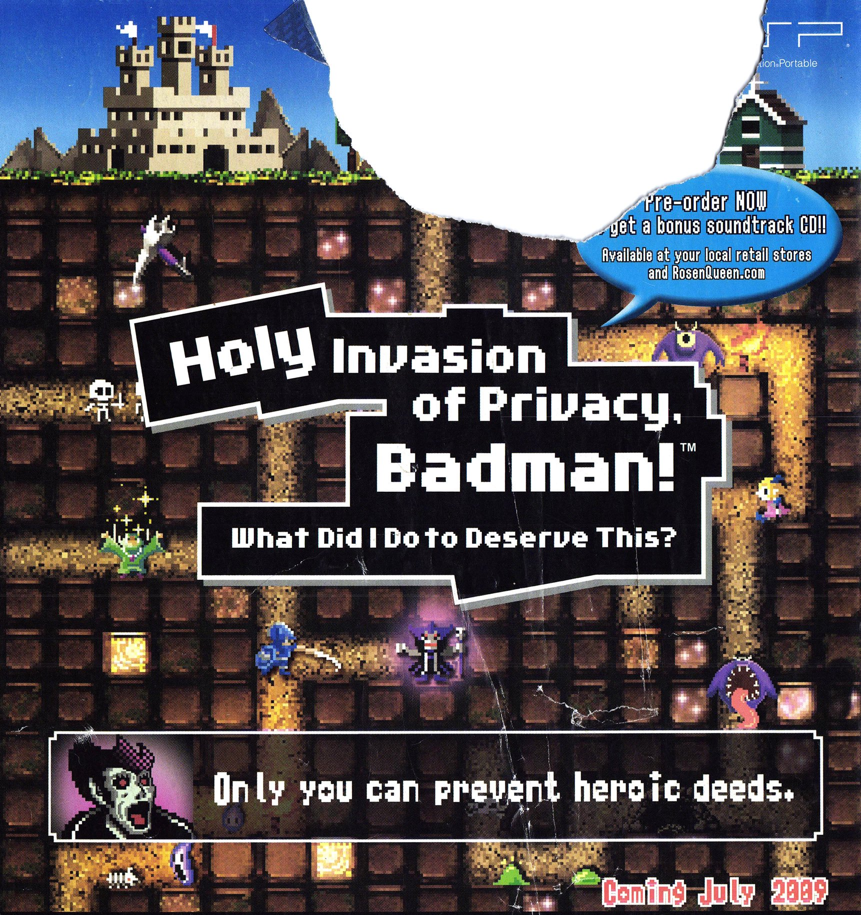

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Animated Blood
Mild Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes

Downloadable Demo will be available
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www.HolyBadman.com

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